United Nations A/S-25/PV.1

General Assembly

Twenty-fifth special session

Official Records

1st meeting
Wednesday, 6 June 2001, 9.05 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Holkeri ..... (Finland)

The meeting was called to order at 9.05 a.m.

Item 1 of the provisional agenda

Opening of the session by the Chairman of the delegation of Finland

The Temporary President: I declare open the twenty-fifth special session of the General Assembly for an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II).

Item 2 of the provisional agenda

Minute of silent prayer or meditation

The Temporary President: I now invite representatives to stand and observe one minute of silent prayer or meditation.

The members of the General Assembly observed a minute of silent prayer or meditation.

Tribute to the memory of the late Kings of the Kingdom of Nepal, His Majesty King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev and His Majesty King Dipendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev

The Temporary President: The General Assembly will pay tribute to the memory of the late Kings of the Kingdom of Nepal, His Majesty King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev and His Majesty King Dipendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev.

On behalf of the General Assembly, I should like to convey our heartfelt condolences to the Government and the people of Nepal and to the bereaved family. I invite representatives to stand and observe a minute of silence in tribute to the memory of the late Kings.

The members of the General Assembly observed a minute of silence.

Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations (A/S-25/4)

The Temporary President: Next, I should like, in keeping with the established practice, to invite the attention of the General Assembly to document A/S-25/4, which contains a letter addressed to the President of the General Assembly by the Secretary-General in which he informs the Assembly that 18 Member States are in arrears in the payment of their financial contributions to the United Nations within the terms of Article 19 of the Charter.

I should like to remind delegations that, under Article 19 of the Charter,

> "A Member of the United Nations which is in arrears in the payment of its financial contributions to the Organization shall have no vote in the General Assembly if the amount of its arrears equals or exceeds the amount of the contributions due from it for the preceding two full years."

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-178. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

01-40004 (E)

May I take it that the General Assembly duly takes note of this information?

It was so decided.

Item 3 of the provisional agenda

Credentials of representatives to the twenty-fifth special session of the General Assembly

(a) Appointment of the members of the Credentials Committee

The Temporary President: Rule 28 of the rules of procedure provides that the General Assembly, at the beginning of each session, shall appoint, on the proposal of the President, a Credentials Committee consisting of nine members.

In accordance with precedents, and as recommended by the Commission on Human Settlements acting as the preparatory committee for the twenty-fifth special session of the General Assembly, the Credentials Committee of the twenty-fifth special session should have the same membership as that of the fifty-fifth regular session of the Assembly, namely, the Bahamas, China, Ecuador, Gabon, Ireland, Mauritius, the Russian Federation, Thailand and the United States of America.

If there is no objection, I shall consider the Credentials Committee constituted accordingly.

It was so decided.

The Temporary President: In this connection, may I invite the attention of the members of the Assembly to a note verbale from the Secretary-General dated 16 April 2001, in which it was stated that credentials should be issued for all representatives to the special session, in accordance with rule 27 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly. I would urge all Members to submit the credentials of representatives to the Secretary-General as soon as possible.

Item 4 of the provisional agenda

Election of the President

The Temporary President: The Commission on Human Settlements, acting as the Preparatory Committee for the twenty-fifth special session, recommends that the twenty-fifth special session should take place under the presidency of the President of the fifty-fifth regular session, His Excellency Mr. Harri Holkeri of Finland.

I take it that the Assembly wishes to elect Mr. Holkeri President of the General Assembly at its twenty-fifth special session by acclamation.

It was so decided.

The Temporary President: I extend my sincere congratulations to His Excellency Mr. Harri Holkeri and invite him to assume the presidency.

I request the Chief of Protocol to escort the President to the podium.

Mr. Holkeri took the Chair.

Address by Mr. Harri Holkeri, President of the General Assembly at its twenty-fifth special session

The President: I am delighted to welcome you all to the twenty-fifth special session of the United Nations General Assembly.

First of all, I wish to thank Mr. Kimmo Sasi, Minister for Foreign Trade of the Republic of Finland, for presiding over the opening of this meeting, prior to my election to this position. I am most grateful and honoured for my unanimous election. I pledge to superintend the session to a successful conclusion.

We live in an urbanizing world. We may say that we are at the beginning of an urban millennium. Less than a year ago, the leaders of the world gathered here, in this same Hall, at the Millennium Summit and expressed their firm commitment to achieve significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million urban slum dwellers by the year 2020. They also resolved to halve poverty by the year 2015. Slums and poverty go together. Therefore, in working for better urban housing, we work towards reducing poverty.

Five years ago in Istanbul, at the second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements, the world community assembled and deliberated on how to cope with the increasing physical, economic, social and environmental demands of the rapidly urbanizing world. The collective wisdom of that Conference constitutes the Habitat Agenda, a global call to action at all levels to improve the conditions and quality of life in the world's cities, towns and villages.

The crux of the Habitat Agenda is to ensure adequate shelter for all and to make human settlements safer, healthier, more pleasant to live in, equitable and productive. The Habitat Agenda also pays attention to the promotion of gender equality and to the empowerment of women as effective ways to combat poverty, hunger and disease, and to stimulate sustainable development and the well-being of people.

In its resolution 52/190, the General Assembly decided to hold this special session of the Assembly to review and appraise progress made to implement the Habitat Agenda. What have we accomplished in the five years since Istanbul at the local, regional and international levels? What will need to be done in the future?

In the preceding months, during the preparatory phase of this session, many important and innovative ideas surfaced through the regional preparatory process. This special session is innovative in its structure. For the first time, we have a Thematic Committee to share experiences from different corners of the world and to learn from each other. In the programme of that Committee we will have the opportunity to listen to examples of implementation of many important issues and aspects pertaining to shelter, social development and the eradication of poverty, environmental management, governance, effective city development strategies and financing for urban development.

In the development of human settlements local government, civil society, trade unions, academia, various community groups and parliamentarians are important partners for Governments and the international community — I am referring here to the Habitat Agenda partners. I am happy to say that many of those partners are participating in this special session. I believe that people and partnerships constitute an important resource for the implementation of the Habitat Agenda.

With these introductory words, let me now call on the Secretary-General of the United Nations, His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan.

Statement by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General: The Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements, whose fifth anniversary we mark with this special session, was not an isolated event. It was an integral part of the series of landmark conferences held by the United Nations during the 1990s. Although each conference had its own specific topic, they were all related to one another and to one overarching aim: to give men, women and children in cities and villages around the world the chance to share in the wealth and opportunities of our time.

The world is in the midst of a historic and radical transformation, not only in how people live, but also in where they live. A majority of the world's people are now city-dwellers, and the rapid increase in urbanization is expected to continue, with most of it occurring in the developing countries. Cities have always been crossroads of peoples and ideas and great founts of culture and innovation. Today, urban areas are the major driving forces of development and globalization.

But with the shift to cities, many of society's inequities and ills are also becoming more and more urban. Two thirds of the cities in the developing world do not have waste water treated. In countries with economies in transition, 75 per cent of solid waste is disposed of in open dumps. And everywhere we see stark contrasts: gritty slums and gleaming skyscrapers side by side in unplanned urban sprawl; conspicuous consumption alongside great pyramids of waste that threaten the environment and human health; and growing gaps between housing costs and housing supply, and between housing costs and the salaries offered by labour markets.

At the same time, we must not forget the needs of rural settlements and communities. After all, in developing countries the rapid rate of urbanization is caused mostly by past failures in rural development. Of the more than 1.2 billion global poor, three quarters live in rural areas. If humanity is to have a sustainable future, we must improve the lives of the poor everywhere.

The Istanbul Conference was an attempt to show that, with proper guidance, urbanization can be a positive force for the reduction of poverty and the achievement of sustainable development. Five years along the path of implementing the Habitat Agenda, a few points stand out.

One is the importance of partnership. Two thirds of the world's cities have established new public-private partnerships in the last five years. Most countries have adapted housing and other policies to

reflect internationally agreed principles. Such steps are not the work of States alone. Local authorities, non-governmental organizations, women's organizations and other civil society groups made enormous contributions. They spread the word, and they mobilized people and lobbied for change.

A second key point is urban governance. This is a precondition for economic efficiency and effective administration. A healthy society is one that gives all its members a chance to participate in decisions that affect their lives. Improved urban governance therefore implies greater democracy and strengthened local authorities. In particular, we must strengthen the role of women and ensure that all decision-makers, male and female, address the issues that affect women, who are the unsung heroes of poor urban areas.

A third very important issue facing tens of millions of urban families is the lack of secure tenure. In some cases, people have houses but lack titles to those houses, and they live in fear of arbitrary forced eviction. Others are engaged in business activities but lack licences to operate them. This absence of legal protection and support often leads to the enlargement of the informal sector, allowing people to put food on the table but inhibiting the ability of people to raise capital, attract investment and receive water and other basic services. We must reduce this insecurity and build up the legal and other infrastructures on which stable communities depend. Action in this area has the potential to create considerable wealth and to provide a major route out of poverty.

The world's cities face a long list of common challenges, which means that rich and poor nations should be able to find common ground. But progress will not happen without leadership. That is where you come in: you, the ministers and mayors responsible for urban policy; you, non-governmental organizations, women's groups and others in civil society. All of you, in your own way, are leaders who must answer to the inhabitants of the world's slums, favelas, barrios, ghettos, shanty-towns and squatter settlements.

Shelter is an often neglected aspect of economic and social development. Our challenge at this special session is to create lasting momentum for action on housing issues. If this session does its work well, you will agree on measures needed to implement not only the Habitat Agenda, but also the Millennium Declaration, in which the world's leaders pledged to achieve significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum-dwellers by 2020. You also have an opportunity to contribute to next year's World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg.

The world has entered the urban millennium. Let us rise to its many challenges. I wish you a very stimulating and productive session.

The President: I thank the Secretary-General for his statement.

Item 5 of the provisional agenda

Report of the Commission on Human Settlements acting as the preparatory committee for the special session of the General Assembly for an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) (A/S-25/2)

The President: I now give the floor to the Chairman of the preparatory committee for the twenty-fifth special session of the General Assembly, His Excellency Mr. Germán García Durán of Colombia.

Mr. García Durán (Colombia, Chairman of the preparatory committee for the twenty-fifth special session of the General Assembly) (*spoke in Spanish*): It is a great honour and pleasure for me to present to the twenty-fifth special session of the General Assembly the report of the Commission on Human Settlements acting as the preparatory committee for the special session of the General Assembly for an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), as contained in document A/S-25/2.

This special session provides us with the opportunity to review and evaluate the progress made in implementing the Habitat programme and to identify additional actions to guide Governments and other relevant actors in the goal of turning promises into action. This is truly an enormous and historic responsibility, which we all share.

The Commission on Human Settlements acting as the preparatory committee for the special session has been working diligently to ensure that the session will truly contribute towards moving the Habitat Agenda forward. The preparatory committee began work in May 1999, in accordance with the relevant provisions of General Assembly resolution 53/180. An

organizational session of the preparatory committee was held in May 1999, during the seventeenth session of the Commission. The members of the current Bureau and the preparatory committee were elected for a term of office that covered the entire preparatory period.

At the national level, Governments were encouraged to organize national Habitat committees in order to coordinate the process of preparing national reports. I am pleased to inform the Assembly that the 96 national reports received indicate that great progress has been made towards fulfilling the commitments. However, more effective action is needed in all areas.

The first substantive session of the preparatory committee was held in Nairobi in May 2000 and considered the following issues: the scope of the special session of the General Assembly; local, national and regional preparations for the special session; the role of local authorities, other partners and relevant United Nations organizations and agencies in the review and appraisal process; and the preparation of a draft declaration. At the conclusion of that session, the Secretariat was requested to prepare an initial draft of the declaration on cities and other human settlements in the new millennium.

At the regional level, Habitat and the regional economic commissions jointly organized five regional meetings between September and November 2000. Four of the regional meetings adopted declarations, while one concluded with a strategy for the implementation of the Habitat Agenda.

Inter-agency meetings on the coordinated implementation of the Habitat Agenda by the United Nations system were held in New York and Nairobi. In order to consult Member States, the Secretariat organized an expert group meeting in November 2000, with a financial contribution from the Government of Sweden and the support of the city of Vasteras, Sweden. All States members of the Commission on Human Settlements, as well as relevant international associations, local authorities and non-governmental organizations, were invited. A partners' meeting on the implementation of the Habitat Agenda was held in Nairobi in February 2001, prior to the second substantive session of the preparatory committee, and about 300 new partners were accredited to the special session during the second session of the preparatory committee.

The draft declaration on cities and other human settlements in the new millennium was considered during the second substantive session of the preparatory committee. Most of the paragraphs were adopted by consensus; exceptions were paragraphs 8, 24, 33, 34, 37, 42 and 49, which were wholly or partly bracketed. Following informal consultations this week, the number of bracketed paragraphs was reduced to five, and an enormous amount of progress has been made towards agreement on them.

We should therefore continue with our deliberations in the Committee of the Whole during this special session so as to arrive at a final agreement on these matters, which will require genuine political will and the taking of responsible political decisions in a spirit of partnership and cooperation — the spirit of Istanbul. I sincerely hope that all who attend the meetings of this special session will make a great and substantive contribution to this process.

The second session of the preparatory committee also reviewed the draft report of the Executive Director of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements on the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. The revised version of this report on the review and appraisal of progress made in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, which is contained in documents A/S-25/3 and A/S-25/3/Add.1, is before the Assembly. This broad report takes fully into account the comments made by delegations during the preparatory committee's second session and summarizes the national reports received by the Centre. The report is thus the principal document for the special session.

Intense discussions resulted in a decision being made during the second session of the preparatory committee regarding the establishment of a Thematic Committee. This Committee represents an innovation in the United Nations and was subsequently approved by General Assembly resolution 55/246 of 21 March 2001.

The preparatory committee further adopted four decisions: on arrangements regarding accreditation of Habitat Agenda partners to the special session; further arrangements regarding accreditation of Habitat Agenda partners to the special session; the preparatory process for the Thematic Committee; and recommendations of the Economic and Social Council.

Although difficult at times, the preparatory process was transparent and extensive, allowing for the

participation of all Member States and observers as well as of organizations of the United Nations system and partners from non-governmental organizations and civil society.

In conclusion, I would like to acknowledge with thanks the hard work and the contributions of my colleagues in the Bureau and of the Habitat secretariat, who have been making enormous sacrifices in the course of the negotiation period. This has been a true team effort, and I am convinced that they will continue their excellent work in the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole of this special session.

The President: I thank the Chairman of the Commission on Human Settlements acting as the preparatory committee for the twenty-fifth special session of the General Assembly for his statement. The General Assembly is grateful to him and to those who participated in the preparatory process for their efforts to get this special session off to a good start.

Item 6 of the provisional agenda

Organization of the session

Draft decision II (A/S-25/2, para. 62)

The President: Members are invited to turn to draft decision II, recommended by the Commission on Human Settlements acting as the preparatory committee for the twenty-fifth special session in paragraph 62 of its report contained in document A/S-25/2.

Draft decision II is entitled "Organizational arrangements for the twenty-fifth special session of the General Assembly".

May I take it that the General Assembly wishes to adopt draft decision II?

Draft decision II was adopted.

The President: On the basis of the decision just taken by the General Assembly on the recommendations of the Commission on Human Settlements acting as the preparatory committee for the special session, the following arrangements shall apply to the twenty-fifth special session.

The Vice-Presidents of the twenty-fifth special session shall be the same as those of the fifty-fifth regular session of the General Assembly. The Vice-Presidents of the fifty-fifth regular session are the following Member States: Belarus, Bhutan, Burkina Faso, China, the Comoros, El Salvador, France, Gabon, Guinea, Haiti, Kuwait, Maldives, Mozambique, the Russian Federation, Suriname, Tunisia, Turkey, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America, Uzbekistan and Yemen.

If there is no objection, I shall take it that the Assembly decides to elect by acclamation those States Vice-Presidents of the twenty-fifth special session of the General Assembly.

It was so decided.

The President: Regarding the Chairpersons of the six Main Committees of the twenty-fifth special session, the Chairpersons of the Main Committees of the fifty-fifth regular session shall serve in the same capacity at the special session.

The Chairpersons of the Main Committees at the fifty-fifth regular session are the following: of the First Committee, U Mya Than of Myanmar; of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee), Mr. Matia Mulumba Semakula Kiwanuka of Uganda; of the Second Committee, Mr. Alexandru Niculescu of Romania; of the Third Committee, Mrs. Yvonne Gittens-Joseph of Trinidad and Tobago; of the Fifth Committee, Mr. Gert Rosenthal of Guatemala; of the Sixth Committee, Mr. Mauro Politi of Italy.

If there is no objection, I take it that the Assembly decides to elect by acclamation those representatives Chairpersons of the Main Committees at the twenty-fifth special session.

It was so decided.

The President: As concerns the First Committee, in the absence of its Chairman, Mr. Abdelkader Mesdoua of Algeria, Vice-Chairman of the First Committee, has been designated to act as Chairman of that Committee for the duration of the special session.

As concerns the Special Political and Decolonization (Fourth) Committee, in the absence of its Chairman, Mr. Patrick Albert Lewis of Antigua and Barbuda, Vice-Chairman of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee), has been designated to act as Chairman of that Committee for the duration of the special session.

As concerns the Sixth Committee, in the absence of its Chairman, Mr. Marcelo Vázquez of Ecuador,

Vice-Chairman of the Sixth Committee, has been designated to act as Chairman of that Committee for the duration of the special session.

In adopting the recommendations of the Commission on Human Settlements acting as the preparatory committee, the Assembly has established an ad hoc committee of the whole, which will be designated Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole of the twenty-fifth special session.

In accordance with the decision just taken by the General Assembly, the Chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole will be a full member of the General Committee of the twenty-fifth special session.

Concerning the election of the Chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole, the preparatory committee recommends that its Chairman, Mr. Germán García Durán of Colombia, serve in the same capacity in the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole.

I take it that it is the wish of the Assembly at its twenty-fifth special session to elect Mr. Germán García Durán by acclamation Chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole.

It was so decided.

The President: I congratulate Mr. Germán García Durán on behalf of the General Assembly and on my own behalf, and I wish him well in the important and onerous responsibilities that he has just assumed for the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole.

In adopting the recommendations of the Commission on Human Settlements acting as the preparatory committee, the General Assembly has established a thematic committee which will be designated Thematic Committee of the twenty-fifth special session.

In accordance with the decision just taken by the General Assembly, the Chairperson of the Thematic Committee will be a full member of the General Committee of the twenty-fifth special session.

Concerning the election of the Chairperson of the Thematic Committee, I should like to inform members that Mr. Slaheddine Belaid of Tunisia has been nominated as Chairperson of the Thematic Committee.

I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to elect Mr. Slaheddine Belaid by acclamation Chairperson of the Thematic Committee.

It was so decided.

The President: I congratulate Mr. Slaheddine Belaid on behalf of the General Assembly and on my own behalf and wish him well in the important responsibilities that he has just assumed for the Thematic Committee.

The General Committee of the twenty-fifth special session of the General Assembly has now been fully constituted.

We turn now to matters concerning the participation of speakers other than Member States in the work of the special session.

On the basis of the decision just taken by the General Assembly, observers may make statements in the debate in plenary. Organizations and entities having received a standing invitation to participate as observers in the sessions and the work of the General Assembly may participate in the twenty-fifth special session as observers. States members of the specialized agencies of the United Nations that are not Members of the United Nations may participate in the work of the twenty-fifth special session as observers.

The following associate members of the regional commissions may participate in the twenty-fifth special session as observers: American Samoa, Anguilla, Aruba, the British Virgin Islands, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the Cook Islands, French Polynesia, Guam, Montserrat, the Netherlands Antilles, New Caledonia, Niue, Puerto Rico and the United States Virgin Islands.

Subject to the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, entities of the United Nations system, including programmes, funds, specialized agencies and regional commissions, with specific expertise in the subject matter of the special session may make statements in the debate in plenary, provided that they are represented at the highest level. Representatives of the United Nations system may also make statements in the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole and in the Thematic Committee.

In accordance with the decision just taken by the General Assembly, representatives of local authorities, non-governmental organizations and other Habitat Agenda partners may make statements in the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole and in the Thematic Committee. Given the time available, a limited number of representatives of local authorities, non-

governmental organizations and other Habitat Agenda partners may make statements in the debate in plenary. In this connection, the President of the General Assembly was requested to submit the list of selected Habitat Agenda partners to Member States for approval and to ensure that the selection was made on an equal and transparent basis, taking into account the geographical representation and diversity of Habitat Agenda partners. In this connection, members will recall my letter of 1 June 2001 addressed to all Permanent Representatives.

Taking into account further information provided by the Secretariat, I should now like to propose to the Assembly the following 11 selected Habitat Agenda partners: African Centre for Empowerment, Gender and Advocacy; Global Parliamentarians for Habitat; Grassroots Organizations Operating Together in Sisterhood; Habitat International Coalition; Habitat Professional Forum; International Confederation of Free Trade Unions; NGO Committee on Human Settlements; Society for the Promotion of Area Resources Centres/Asia Women and Shelter Network; Women and Shelter Network, Latin American and Caribbean Region; World Association of Cities and Local Authorities Co-ordination; and Youth for Habitat.

May I take it that the Assembly agrees that representatives from these 11 selected Habitat Agenda partners may make statements in the debate in the plenary of the special session?

It was so decided.

The President: Those 11 organizations will therefore be added to the list of speakers, and their statements will be limited to five minutes.

By adopting the recommendations of the Commission on Human Settlements acting as the preparatory committee, the General Assembly has decided that the last two speaking slots at each plenary meeting, with the exception of the first and last meetings, will be reserved for participants other than Member States, the Holy See, Switzerland and Palestine, provided they are represented at the highest level. In this connection, further to the letter I addressed to the Permanent Representatives, and taking into account further information provided by the Secretariat, I propose to Members the following speakers for those eight spots. For the plenary meeting this afternoon, I propose the Executive Director of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) and the President of the World Association of Cities and Local Authorities. For the plenary meeting to be held on Thursday morning, 7 June, the proposed speakers are the President of the Habitat Professional Forum and the President of the Global Parliamentarians for Habitat. For the plenary meeting on Thursday afternoon, the Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the Chairperson of the NGO Committee on Human Settlements. Finally, for the plenary meeting on Friday morning, 8 June, the Director of the United Nations Environment Programme and the President of the Grassroots Organizations Operating Together in Sisterhood.

I take it that the General Assembly endorses the list of speakers for the eight reserved spots.

It was so decided.

The President: I should like to remind delegates that statements in the debate in plenary meetings are limited to five minutes.

In accordance with the decision just adopted by the Assembly, there will be six plenary meetings over the three-day period, with two meetings per day: from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. and from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. I should like to inform Members that I intend to start the plenary meetings promptly at 9 a.m. and 3 p.m. In this connection, I would like to assure the Assembly that I will try to be in the Chair punctually at the scheduled time. I sincerely hope that all delegations will make all special efforts to cooperate in this regard.

With regard to the length of statements in the debate in the plenary, I should like to remind delegates that, on the basis of the decision just adopted by the Assembly, all statements in the debate in the plenary shall be limited to five minutes. In connection with the time limits, a light system has been installed at the speaker's rostrum, which functions as follows: a green light will be activated at the start of the speaker's statement; an orange light will be activated 30 seconds before the end of the five minutes; and a red light will be activated when the five-minute limit has elapsed. I should like to appeal to speakers in the debate in plenary meeting to cooperate in observing the time limits of their statements, so that all those inscribed on the list of speakers for a given meeting will be heard at that meeting.

I should now like to draw the attention of delegates to a matter concerning the participation of Palestine, in its capacity as observer, in the sessions and work of the General Assembly.

Members will recall General Assembly resolution 52/250 of 7 July 1998 and its annex, as well as a note by the Secretary-General contained in document A/52/1002 that outlines the Secretary-General's understanding of the implementation of the modalities annexed to the resolution.

I should like to draw your attention in particular to paragraph 6 of the annex to resolution 52/250, which reads as follows:

> "The right to make interventions, with a precursory explanation or the recall of relevant General Assembly resolutions being made only once by the President of the General Assembly at the start of each session of the Assembly."

Accordingly, for the twenty-fifth special session of the General Assembly, the observer of Palestine will participate in the work of the General Assembly in accordance with General Assembly resolution 3237 (XXIX) of 22 November 1974, resolution 43/177 of 15 December 1988 and resolution 52/250 of 7 July 1998, with no further need for a precursory explanation prior to any intervention by Palestine in this special session.

Item 7 of the provisional agenda

Adoption of the agenda

The President: The provisional agenda of the twenty-fifth special session of the General Assembly is contained in document A/S-25/1, which has been recommended for adoption by the Commission on Human Settlements acting as the preparatory committee for the twenty-fifth special session in draft decision I, in paragraph 62 of its report contained in document A/S-25/2.

In order to expedite its work, the Assembly may wish to consider the provisional agenda directly in plenary meeting, without referring it to the General Committee.

May I take it that the General Assembly agrees to this procedure?

It was so decided.

The President: May I take it, then, that the Assembly wishes to adopt the provisional agenda as it appears in document A/S-25/1?

It was so decided.

The President: Regarding the allocation of items, on the basis of the decision taken by the General Assembly, all the items on the agenda are to be considered directly in plenary meetings. In addition, items 8, 9 and 10 have also been allocated to the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole of the Twenty-Fifth Special Session for consideration, on the understanding that the debate on those items shall take place in plenary.

Agenda item 8

Review and appraisal of progress made in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda

Note by the Secretary-General (A/S-25/3 and Add.1)

Agenda item 9

Further actions and initiatives for overcoming obstacles to the implementation of the Habitat Agenda

Agenda item 10

Declaration on cities and other human settlements in the new millennium

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Gennady Novitsky, Deputy Prime Minister of Belarus.

Mr. Novitsky (Belarus) (*spoke in Russian*): The United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), held in 1996, drew the attention of the international community to the problem of cities. We deem it important, during this special session of the General Assembly, to consider the matter of how the recommendations of that Conference are being implemented. This is of particular importance in view of the preparations for, and the holding of, the World Summit on Sustainable Development, to be held in September 2002.

Our delegation fully supports the report of the Executive Director of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements and the recommendations made to

all participants in the global process to involve themselves in efforts to achieve sustainable development. We must give priority to the development of appropriate national legislation.

At the present stage of its development, Belarus is laying the foundation for a socially oriented market economy. Belarus has a large industrial, agricultural and intellectual capacity. Our country is playing an increasingly important role in meeting the challenges of the world community with a view to attaining the goals of sustainable development. Since 1992 Belarus has been carrying out a housing reform, with the goal of guaranteeing our citizens' constitutional right to acquire property and to build, reconstruct or lease housing facilities.

In order to resolve the problems of the comprehensive development of human settlements in the light of the recommendations of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, five years ago in Belarus we set up a national commission to develop human settlements on the basis of partnership among the central, regional and local administration. The commission is seeking to strengthen the economic basis of cities, to provide housing to those in need, to improve communications networks and to protect the environment.

The Commission has worked out a basic urban planning document — a State plan for the nationwide territorial organization of the Republic of Belarus. This national plan for the Republic was endorsed by our Government in 2000. Pursuant to the plan, our Republic has laid down and is consistently carrying out a strategy aimed at building a new generation of houses. That strategy consists of enhancing the quality of housing facilities. We are using new construction methods and better construction materials, and the quality of the new housing has increased significantly.

A new and promising area is the comprehensive reconstruction of residential areas through increased density. We are setting up a fund for public housing and building new, high-quality apartments.

In summing up the work done so far by the Commission, we can say that we have succeeded in maximizing cooperation among the organs of the various authorities at different levels. Indeed, the Commission is helping to create the necessary conditions for the sustainable development of towns in our Republic.

The Chernobyl accident was an enormous problem for our country and caused tremendous damage. About 70 per cent of the radioactive fallout after the explosion landed on Belarus. As a result, we were forced to seal off 485 human settlements and to resettle 135,000 people. We had to build 65,000 apartments and houses to accommodate those people.

The total damage caused to Belarus by the Chernobyl catastrophe was, according to some calculations, $235 billion, a sum 30 times larger than the 1985 national annual budget of Belarus. Quite clearly, the scale of the radiation load is out of all proportion with the funds we have available. Accordingly, we hope to see expanded cooperation with the United Nations system to try to minimize the consequences of that horrendous manmade twentieth-century disaster.

Allow me to brief the Assembly about some of the national measures that have been undertaken by Belarus to prepare for this international forum.

First, the national commission was designated to act as the preparatory committee. Secondly, we studied the recommendations of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UNCHS) on collecting and analysing information on the development of human settlements over the last five years, in order to prepare national reports. Thirdly, we prepared an inter-agency national report reflecting the situation, the problems and the development trends of the cities of our Republic.

We hope that the information provided, which is both analytic and forward-looking, will be included in the global report as part of the overall picture of urbanization throughout the world.

In conclusion, allow me to take note of and to commend the contribution made by the United Nations, and in particular by the Commission on Human Settlements, in the process of the sustainable development of cities. I should like in particular to note the work done by the secretariat of the United Nations Office in Nairobi in preparing for this special session.

Let me also take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the Habitat experts for what they have done in Belarus. They have helped us to elaborate and carry out a number of specific projects and programmes. Allow me to voice the hope that the goal of the sustainable development of human settlements

will be promoted, during the special session, by the declaration on cities and other human settlements in the new millennium.

We believe that it is important to maintain and expand a consistent, balanced type of international cooperation within the framework of this important document. Furthermore, the interests of States that are at different stages of the process of socio-economic development have to be taken into account.

We hope that, in the third millennium, our overall potential and our common experience in resolving global problems will provide a fresh impetus to the development of human civilization.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Husni Abu-Gheida, Minister of Public Work and Housing of Jordan.

Mr. Abu-Gheida (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): I am pleased, Mr. President, to congratulate you and the other members of the Bureau on your election; this reflects the Assembly's confidence in you as leaders of this special session. We trust, Sir, that your wisdom and patience will guide us to positive decisions that will help address humanity's growing needs in terms of sustainable development at a time of accelerating urbanization, particularly in developing countries.

We support the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) as it coordinates the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, and we support the Centre's activities at the regional and international levels. Jordan is among the countries that makes significant voluntary contributions to the Centre. Beginning in 1979 it hosted the regional office for the Arab countries. We provided financial and logistical support for many of the programmes and activities that preceded the 1996 Istanbul Conference, and have participated on the Arab and international levels in their preparation and implementation. We hope that Habitat will consider reopening the regional office in my country's capital, Amman, so that it can make a contribution to the implementation of the Habitat Agenda in the Arab region.

My Government's commitment to the implementation of the Habitat Agenda and to the Centre is crystal clear, as reflected in our political will to adopt measures with respect to the housing sector and to liberalization of the land market and of financing. Believing that the human being should be the focus of development efforts, my country has been able to provide secure ownership of property for some 300,000 people who had been squatting on State land by offering them that land at a token price; in that way, we sustain the human right of basic shelter through the improvement of financial and social infrastructures and by ensuring public safety within internationally acceptable standards.

Many public-private partnerships have been established to provide housing and to make the housing system more just and transparent, and to create a mortgage market that provides long-term financing for low-income or limited-income families.

Development in the Arab region faces total collapse owing to the war imposed on the Palestinian people, the violence of the Israeli army of occupation, incursions into Palestinian towns and cities, the destruction of civilian housing, the confiscation of land and the spread of Israeli settlements on Palestinian territory. Here I would refer to Security Council resolutions 446 (1979) and 465 (1980) on the illegality of such settlements and on the threat they pose to the attainment of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East — quite apart from the harmful effects on Palestinian communities and the negative socio-economic impact on the citizens of Palestine and of the occupied Syrian Golan, as highlighted by the General Assembly in many resolutions. I would refer also to the report of the Mitchell Fact-Finding Committee, which called for a complete freeze of illegal Israeli settlements; that was indeed the main focus of the report.

There can be no development without just, lasting and comprehensive peace. Jordan and Egypt have submitted specific proposals for ending the aggression against the Palestinian people, for lifting the blockade imposed upon it and for putting in place appropriate conditions for the resumption of the peace process. The international community has already welcomed that Arab effort, and views it as further proof of our nation's orientation towards peace.

We believe in the premise of a collective responsibility to achieve peace and stability in the world and in our region in particular, which has implications for urban development. We therefore appeal for the provision of the protection that the Palestinian people need. We call for assistance to the Palestinian people in achieving self-determination and

in establishing an independent State on its national soil with holy Jerusalem as its capital. We call for an end to all forms of occupation and tension in our region, both in the Golan Heights and in southern Lebanon, and, of course, for an end to the blockade against Iraq.

Let us all work together to protect the environment and to promote peace and human welfare.

The President: I give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Josefina Vazquez Mota, Minister of Social Development of Mexico.

Ms. Vazquez Mota (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): It is an honour for me at this important forum to convey my greetings to ministers, heads of delegation and legislators from the countries participating in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda.

Mexico and the rest of the world are today in the midst of profound change, few of them as relevant as the urbanization of developing countries. Many of the challenges posed by the process of urbanization were recognized by the nations that were present at the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), held at Istanbul in 1996, where proposals were made and specific objectives established for participating countries. Over the past five years, Mexico has made progress towards meeting those objectives.

We have adapted our legal framework for urban planning to give greater power to local authorities. We have fought poverty and promoted gender equality.

On environmental issues, Mexico has adopted the principles of Agenda 21, and with respect to housing, we are now in the process of establishing a national housing council which will organize and coordinate the public and private productive sectors to bolster the housing market and to facilitate financing. We are also making progress on strategies for land management and urban development. This has led to the better-balanced growth of Mexican cities.

Yet we still face major challenges. Mexico's rural population is widely dispersed, and our population is largely concentrated in four major metropolitan areas. In addition we have seen new phenomena in the process of urbanization, such as the formation of new metropolitan areas, of a megalopolis and of urban corridors.

As a result, the management of human settlements, careful, systematic planning of urban development and housing supply in harmony with the environment and with respect for natural resources are all of special relevance to Mexico; these are basic issues for this special session.

The national development plan presented to our people just a few days ago by President Vicente Fox incorporates land management, regional and urban development and the construction of housing, with special attention to two major components: social and human development; and growth with quality. Those topics are given priority on our national agenda.

Mexico is well aware that the challenges of urbanization require a comprehensive view of development, including environmental, social, cultural, economic and political aspects. In that framework, Mexico wishes to present to the Assembly four fundamental proposals.

First, a link should be established between environmental and urban development activities both in national policy and in the proposals made and the work done by various international forums and organizations.

Secondly, it is necessary to group together and to consider the problems that are shared by a number of countries, for example those of the Latin American and Caribbean region, in order to develop regional action plans.

Our third proposal is to develop budgetary instruments and incentives, devised in consultation with our legislators, with a view to enhancing urban governability and relating the process of decentralization to integral land management and urban development policies.

Fourthly, we must consider five different territorial scales attending the urbanization and land development process: the regional, megalopolitan and metropolitan levels, urban corridors and population centres. In this context, the coordination of metropolitan areas is one of the major challenges of today's world. In order to coordinate the development of a metropolis in which various municipal and state authorities interact requires policies to be attuned to these different levels of government and efficient mechanisms to make use of shared potential and infrastructure. We also propose international

cooperation for the financing of studies or projects for metropolitan coordination, including exchanges of successful technologies and experiences among countries.

Urban population is growing quickly in the third world and poverty has thus become more urbanized. Squatter settlements, poverty belts and low-income areas, which are generally at great risk in times of natural disaster, are often part of the picture in the developing countries. Disasters caused by natural phenomena undoubtedly affect the poorest and the cost of disasters is always higher than that of investment in preventive action. It is therefore essential that further work be done in the field of land-use management in order to mitigate the consequences of natural disasters.

We must also recognize the patrimonial needs of our poorest population. Having a patrimony is a source of security for families and ensuring that the neediest hold title to property, appropriately documenting their patrimony, will be an integral part of fighting poverty in Mexico.

We propose from this high rostrum that the Habitat Centre promote a world campaign for education and awareness of the meaning of habitat. Consolidating the habitat culture in our societies would lead to structural and progressive changes in our citizens' lives.

The century ahead is rich in challenges. The most important of these is to fulfil the range of commitments that will allow us to have an increasingly harmonious, just and sustainable world. The rapid growth of world population must be organized around land and urban development in balance with the environment and with economic growth. We recognize that we cannot leave it all to the State and to the cold calculations of supply and demand.

Talking about habitat means talking about the human being as the starting point and the end-user of all of our decisions. Disorderly demographic growth, the over-exploitation of habitat, lack of infrastructure and opportunities, and decreasing levels of education will lead our countries towards poverty, marginalization and a progressive crumbling of the social fabric. If we do not act today with firmness and conviction, we will be compromising the right to life of future generations.

For this purpose, we need concrete and effective cooperation from the developed countries and international organizations, allowing financial and institutional resources to be channelled towards that end. We all know that poverty is the enemy of peace, development and democracy. For all of these reasons, Mexico reiterates its unequivocal commitment to the principles of the Habitat Agenda in order to find formulas to remedy the failings of management and the lack of resources for urban development, land-use planning and housing, so that we may achieve better standards of living for our societies.

This is a new day for Mexico: a new day of democracy, a new day of change and of hope. We in Mexico believe that this must be a new day for habitat.

The President: I give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Sankie Mthembi-Mahanyele, Minister of Housing of South Africa.

Ms. Mthembi-Mahanyele (South Africa): After years of colonial and apartheid planning in South Africa, the country has come a long way, from focusing on undoing and redressing past injustices to introducing new policies and strategies based on principles of integration and sustainability, people-driven development, satisfying basic needs, transparency and nation-building. Our Constitution, adopted in 1996, provides the cornerstone for all policy and legislation. Its Bill of Rights provides for a rights-based approach to governance, development and justice.

Within this context, one of the key priorities of our Government this year is to make a decisive and integrated contribution towards meeting the economic challenges our country faces. President Thabo Mbeki, in his state-of-the-nation address in February 2001, indicated that investment in economic infrastructure will be prioritized to support high-growth areas. He announced that the priority economic growth sectors are tourism, agriculture and energy, and we recognize that sustainable settlements are vital to the development of these sectors.

R6 billion, equivalent to $750 million, have been allocated over the next three years for the implementation of an integrated rural sustainable development strategy and an urban renewal programme in South Africa. These programmes are aimed at implementing a sustained campaign against rural and urban poverty and underdevelopment by, amongst other

things, investing in economic and social infrastructure, human resource development, enterprise development, the enhancement of the developmental capacity of local government, poverty alleviation and the strengthening of the criminal justice system. The Ministry of Housing is actively involved in these programmes to ensure that human settlement and housing issues are well integrated into these important national priorities.

The fundamental objectives we seek to achieve nationally are driving our economy into a high-growth path by increasing its competitiveness and efficiency, raising employment levels, reducing poverty and addressing persistent inequalities.

The Government of South Africa is grateful to the international community for its support towards our achieving our vision of adequate and sustainable human settlements. In striving towards the achievement of an African renaissance, we recognize the important coordinating role which the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) can fulfil in building links and sharing best practices in our region. We therefore look forward to a strengthening of the Centre as an acknowledgement of the important role it plays, particularly in our region.

South Africa, furthermore, supports the Centre's global campaigns for good governance and secure tenure as cornerstones for the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. We would accordingly report on the implementation of these themes in our country.

We support the principle of the maximum devolution of governance and that of strong local government as key to the successful implementation of the Habitat Agenda. Our second round of participatory democratic municipal elections has been successful and the reorganization and rationalization of our municipalities is proceeding. The Municipal Systems Act of 2000 provides for integrated development planning processes and for performance-based local government, which is beginning to make its impact felt in the area of good local governance.

South Africa has focused its efforts and commitment on a democratic, sustainable process of housing development that gives priority to the needs of the poor and special focus groups in our society. Those include youths, the elderly, persons with disabilities, women and victims of HIV/AIDS. Second, it involves meaningful and wide-ranging consultative processes with affected individuals and communities. Third, it provides for as wide a choice of tenure options as possible, with emphasis on full title, without neglecting informal land rights and rental options. Fourth, it ensures as wide a choice of housing and tenure options as is reasonable and affordable. Fifth, it is economically, fiscally, socially and financially affordable and sustainable. Sixth, it is based on the principle of integrated development planning. Seventh, it is administered in a transparent, accountable and equitable manner and upholds the practice of good governance. It also encourages and supports individuals and communities in their efforts to fulfil their own housing needs by assisting them, through the People's Housing Process, in accessing land, services and technical assistance in a way that leads to the transfer of skills to the community. And it promotes environmentally sound human settlements through a wide range of interventions that place emphasis on energy efficiency, water efficiency and sustainable greening of the living environment.

One of South Africa's key successes is the fact that the right to adequate housing is enshrined in the Constitution. In order to satisfy that right, the housing programme has delivered over 1,155,300 houses; and, to date, close to more than 5 million people have been housed. The South African presentation to the Thematic Committee will provide more detail in this regard.

When South Africa committed itself to the Habitat Agenda, in 1996, a number of the concepts embodied in the Agenda were already being implemented through the Reconstruction and Development Programme. Since then, many advances have been made in our persistent efforts to fight poverty and underdevelopment in all sectors of society. Despite those advances, after six years we are still faced with daunting challenges. We are concentrating our efforts on bridging gaps and planning our housing programme in such a way that it responds to a dynamic housing environment, especially the strategic needs of our main target group, the poor.

Challenges that require our special attention include confronting and managing the social, economic and legal impacts of the HIV/AIDS epidemic on our human settlements programmes. On this basis, we are undertaking research on the impacts of the epidemic on the housing sector as a whole. Secondly, we are promoting informal settlement eradication, inner city renewal and safer cities free from crime.

With regard to poverty eradication, the target group for our national housing programme is the poor. We feel the issue of poverty is closely linked to the housing problems we face, which include homelessness and informal settlements. In this regard, we are examining the sustainability of the current housing subsidy programme so that it can continue to contribute towards meeting the housing needs of the poor, thus contributing towards poverty alleviation.

The housing subsidy programme targets poverty by empowering the poor to participate in the economy by giving them shelter that they can utilize for economic purposes as small enterprise bases; empowering small and emerging contractors by awarding housing construction contracts on an affirmative procurement basis; empowering women through the People's Housing Process to acquire skills to provide their own housing and to participate in the construction sector; and generating employment, because our housing construction projects promote the employment of local communities and the use of local suppliers of materials.

South Africa is also working to develop mechanisms to expand access to housing credit and finance to potential housing beneficiaries, especially those with incomes of less than 2,000 rand per month — which is the equivalent of $250 — to assist them to improve the houses provided through the subsidy programme. To that end, the Ministry of Housing is developing a national savings initiative whose major aim will be to link savings, credit and the subsidy to allow potential beneficiaries to contribute and actively participate in their housing provision.

In conclusion, South Africa is committed to the existing international partnerships we have. We believe that there are valuable lessons to be learned from each other. We also believe that continuing to support each other through our strengths, skills and experiences will assist all of us in achieving our common goals, focused on a sustainable future for all, especially the poor and the homeless in our communities.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Lars-Erik Lövdén, Minister for Housing of Sweden.

Mr. Lövdén (Sweden): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union and the associated countries. I am pleased to take the floor at this crucial session for the review and appraisal of the Habitat Agenda.

Aware that five years is a short period, we have gathered to critically assess how we have tackled all the challenges that are implicit in the Istanbul Declaration and the Habitat Agenda, and how, in our future action, we will deal with these. The world's people in urban and rural areas, especially those living in poverty, are dependent upon us to fulfil the commitments of Istanbul.

We all know that urbanization is a complex phenomenon affecting all parts of the world, and one which raises fundamental political issues that must be addressed in order to achieve an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable society. It is about empowering people and creating decent and healthy living conditions. It is about achieving social equity and an environmentally sound future. We need to develop adequate services, facilities, transport and other types of social infrastructure, as well as integrated spatial planning, which take into account the important connections between urban and rural areas. These are important political challenges that we, ministers charged with human settlements issues, face and have to meet.

A key to success is good governance — the promotion of transparent, responsible, accountable, just, effective and efficient governance of towns, cities and metropolitan areas.

The follow-up to the Istanbul Conference calls for a more decisive approach and a strategic mobilization of political will to ensure the full implementation of the Habitat Agenda in the future. In order to make our commitments clear and decisive we must raise awareness about human settlements challenges and give this special session a powerful, visionary political message: that our endeavour to improve living conditions for all — especially those living in poverty and slums and the homeless — will result in concrete action and not just in words.

As emphasized in the Habitat Agenda, the sustainable development of cities and other human settlements is fundamental to economic growth, social and cultural progress and environmental protection. Bearing this in mind, we find it worrying to note that the concentration of poverty, homelessness and slums is increasingly associated with the growth of the world's urban population. The right to adequate shelter

for all is far from realized, even in developed countries. The question of combating social exclusion is specifically mentioned in the European Union Treaty of Amsterdam, and has been dealt with in several meetings held among European heads of State and Government. We must do our utmost to promote enabling approaches for people with limited resources to house themselves, as well as to increase financial resources for low-income housing, including transparent and financially sustainable subsidies.

Mainstreaming gender perspective in human settlements is crucial in order to achieve full implementation of the Habitat Agenda. Special efforts must be made to counteract discrimination against women, especially in respect of their security of tenure and their individual right to own property.

Making globalization work effectively for those living in poverty is, of course, a moral imperative for Governments, the private sector and civil society alike in both North and South. The primary responsibility for sustainable development and the eradication of poverty lies with national Governments. As agreed in the Millennium Declaration, the international community has a joint responsibility to achieve, by 2015, the international development target of reducing by half the proportion of the world's people whose income is less than $1 a day, as well as to achieve, by 2020, a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum-dwellers, as proposed in the Cities Without Slums initiative. To this end, the European Union urges that efforts should be strengthened towards the fulfilment of the agreed official development assistance target of 0.7 per cent of gross national product.

The European Union believes that concrete actions should be considered while we continue to fulfil our commitments made in Istanbul. For instance, we should spare no effort to promote access to safe drinking water for all and to facilitate the provision of basic infrastructure and urban services.

We sincerely believe that local authorities are essential to further implement the Habitat Agenda. They are the closest partners to citizens, historically linked with the fulfilment of their basic needs. Increasing cooperation, based on agreed principles, between all levels of Government, is therefore required.

In this regard, we should, in accordance with national legislation, strengthen the capacities of local governments, in particular their financial capacities. We should also devolve responsibility and transfer financial resources to local governments to promote linked coherent actions, specifically to promote provision of land, adequate infrastructure and basic services.

The Habitat Agenda cannot be fully implemented without inclusive cooperation between all Habitat partners. The cooperation between Governments, non-governmental organizations and representatives from local authorities and the private sector is of particular importance in order to promote a participatory citizenship. We also need to address the need to adopt more sustainable production and consumption patterns.

Given the crucial role that cities and other human settlements have to play in sustainable development, the outcome of Istanbul+5 will be an important contribution to Rio+10, the World Summit on Sustainable Development, in Johannesburg next year. The Habitat Agenda offers valuable tools for the handling of many of the issues of Agenda 21. It is therefore of utmost importance to reflect on how we best can build on the existing fundamental links between the Habitat Agenda and Agenda 21.

This special session gives the international community an important opportunity to express its political will to identify and endorse ways of realizing a better world with adequate shelter for all and sustainable development of human settlements. These are political challenges for which we, ministers charged with human settlements issues, have a responsibility in our pursuit of peace, justice and democracy through economic, cultural, social and environmental development. The European Union is committed to continuing to actively work to achieve these important intentions, and we are happy to invite the Assembly to take part in the European Union measures and intentions in connection with the Habitat Agenda, as described in a booklet that will be distributed.

The President: I should like to appeal to the speakers in the debate to respect as much as possible the given five-minute time limit.

I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Sadiq Baksh, Minister of Housing and Settlements of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Baksh (Trinidad and Tobago): I am honoured to participate in the twenty-fifth special session of the General Assembly.

Today is the first year of the new millennium, the year 2001. We have come together to support a global effort that will change the development standards for human settlements during the rest of the twenty-first century.

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago would like to commend the United Nations for its renewed vigour in dealing with the issues of globalization and underdevelopment, notably the issue of poverty eradication. We in Trinidad and Tobago have, in our own way, become part of the global campaigns for security of tenure and urban governance. With Habitat and our local voluntary sector and local government institutions as our partners, we have sought to raise awareness and to improve national policies and local strategies to reduce urban poverty. About this and other major issues, we have been thinking globally and acting locally.

Our Government is firmly committed to democracy. We consider social inclusion and justice, as well as the promotion of more transparent and accountable institutions, to be as indispensable to democracy as are free and fair elections. By these standards, democracy is alive and well in Trinidad and Tobago.

Participation and partnership, to the extent and in the spirit envisaged by the Agenda, are nothing new to Trinidad and Tobago. We have many very active non-governmental organizations (NGOs), some of which are allied to international NGOs.

We also have several mechanisms, including a national self-help commission, and many government agencies that facilitate and support voluntary activities in such areas as housing, health and the development of women. Because of this participatory approach to urban and rural development, the need for shelter, the empowerment of women and the need to provide comfort to the landless and dispossessed, Trinidad and Tobago has made substantial progress since the last Habitat Conference.

We have adopted a number of strategies, including legislation, more appropriate institutional support structures and a supportive environment for increasing the land and housing stock through multiple and "smart" partnerships.

Now in our second term in office, our Government has benefited from the experiences gained during the first term and has reshaped our approach to development in the context of a number of national objectives.

These are sustainable growth, an intelligent nation, more and better jobs, a faster pace of development, a better quality of life for all of our citizens, peace, security and harmony, greater equity in our society and a competitive economy, which all impact on the goal of providing sustainable human settlements. Trinidad and Tobago is faced with the challenge of providing 40,000 shelter solutions over the next five years. Forty per cent will target squatter and low-income households. Our national nine-point plan will succeed only if the potential of this large, dynamic, entrepreneurial and innovative informal and low-income sector is harnessed and used creatively.

In the area of legislation, we have introduced four major Acts of Parliament to rationalize the land registration, planning and land use policies and systems of the country to make delivery of land and housing products more efficient, available and affordable for citizens. Our Government has also re-shaped its ministerial portfolios to focus on delivery. Local government authorities, in particular, will now have an increased role to play in strengthening the links between the enlightened economic policies of our Government and the management of land and housing.

Perhaps the greatest success of Trinidad and Tobago in addressing the housing needs of its citizens is in partnering with groups in civil society. Government focus has shifted to developing partnerships with NGOs, the private sector, trade unions and community-based groups in expanding the delivery process. We are emphasizing the use of indigenous materials and technologies to lower the cost of building components and increase the housing stock.

My ministry has developed a five-year plan for the period 2001-2006 to facilitate housing construction, land development, the regularization of tenure of squatters and the upgrading of squatter sites. Our goal is to complete the construction of 30,000 new housing units within wholesome, healthy and integrated rural and urban communities in a five-year period. We propose to regularize the tenure of 2,000 squatters

annually and upgrade the sites on which they are located. It is expected that achieving this goal will cost an estimated $100 million annually. We will need international support to mobilize these resources of manpower, mind power, material and money.

The goal of cities without slums by the year 2015, whether in Port-of-Spain, our capital city, or in any other city of the developing world, cannot be achieved if we do not commit ourselves to assisting the least developed countries among us to achieve this noble yet difficult objective. We also need to revisit the international and national frameworks and institutions that hinder the enjoyment of the basic right of housing the world over. I would therefore like to take this opportunity to exhort all partners to reaffirm our commitment to the principles of the Agenda. I reaffirm the political will of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to this goal.

Trinidad and Tobago, a unitary State of two small islands in the Caribbean Sea, has demonstrated its capacity for creativity and cooperation. From discarded oil drums, we created a new musical instrument: the steel pan. From a past of colonialism and indentureship, we have forged a democratic country in which every creed and race finds an equal place. We are part of this struggle for better lives for all. We, too, would like to see poverty eradicated. We, too, would like to see a world without slums, one in which every man, woman and child, every creed, race, colour and class, finds an equal place. In return, we ask for the support of the international community and the international financial institutions only for those resources which we do not have and cannot mobilize.

We look forward to participating in the deliberations during the next few days as we seek creative and sustainable solutions to the global problems of inadequate housing, landlessness and poverty, and to ensure the full and equal participation of women.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Jang-Seop Oh, Minister of Construction and Transportation of the Republic of Korea.

Mr. Oh (Republic of Korea) (*spoke in Korean; English text furnished by the delegation*): It is a great honour for me to represent the Republic of Korea at this important meeting. As we enter the new millennium, the process of globalization is rapidly transforming our world, with widespread implications for our habitat. For this reason, this is an opportune time for us to appraise our achievements since the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) five years ago and to renew our commitment to enhancing the living environment.

Over recent decades, a worldwide trend towards urbanization has dramatically altered our socio-economic situation, so that half of the world's population now reside in cities. Furthermore, the rapid development of transportation and communication systems has enabled people to live in closer proximity and become better connected than ever before.

From an economic, social and cultural standpoint, cities are becoming an increasingly important space for humankind. At the same time, the rapid growth of the urban population has posed serious social and economic problems that threaten sustainable development and the guarantee of an adequate habitat. These problems include a lack of roads, water supplies and other basic infrastructure and services; disparities in wealth; environmental pollution; and urban crime.

While the urban problems are largely concentrated in the developing world, they are by no means confined to a specific area. For this reason, the effective implementation of the Agenda set forth at Habitat II has become a common task for the global community.

The Republic of Korea attaches great importance to the outcome of Habitat II. We are determined to implement the action plans proposed at the Conference in the most efficient manner. We have concentrated our efforts thus far on two objectives: adequate shelter for all, and sustainable human settlement development.

To this end, the central Government has been cooperating with major stakeholders, including local government and civic organizations. As a result, improvements have been made not only to the stability of the supply of shelter, land ownership, equality in use and other basic shelter services, but also to overall living conditions, such as shelter environment and home financing. In particular, since the late 1980s, efforts to expand the housing supply have resolved the nationwide housing shortage. The quality of shelter has also been enhanced, in particular by enlarging the living space and by modern facilities. As I mentioned earlier, the important role played by local government

and civic organizations in housing policy has been acknowledged and further strengthened.

However, the unprecedented financial crisis that we faced in late 1997 led to greater uncertainty for Korea's housing policies. In the wake of the crisis, housing construction dwindled and household income declined in both real and nominal terms. Faced with these new challenges, the Korean Government has introduced a number of bold measures to normalize the housing market.

The easing or deregulation of many land and housing-related ordinances has been a key part of the reform process. In addition, advanced real estate financing techniques have been introduced.

As part of the effort to enhance the social safety net in times of crisis, the National Basic Living Standard Guarantee Act was enacted to better assist the socially vulnerable and disadvantaged. Acknowledging the important role played by women in improving habitat, the Republic of Korea recently promulgated the Sexual Discrimination Prohibition Act and established the Ministry of Gender Equality.

In response to the growing interest among the Korean people in the quality of life, especially with respect to the environment, the central and local governments have been encouraged to reinforce their environment-related functions and to lend their support to non-profit organizations devoted to environmental issues. While we recognize these significant achievements, a number of challenges, including the continued concentration of the population in the capital region and the ensuing socio-economic problems, still need to be addressed.

Finally, Korea has been recognized as one of the world's most successful countries in terms of the provision of an adequate supply of housing in a relatively short period. In this regard, we are ready to share our experiences with developing countries and to assist them within our capacities.

I can assure you that the Republic of Korea remains fully committed to the implementation of the Istanbul Declaration and the Habitat Agenda. The Republic of Korea also wholeheartedly supports the adoption of the declaration at this session and intends to participate actively in international efforts to tackle global shelter problems.

The President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Cristodoulos Christodoulou, Minister of the Interior of Cyprus.

Mr. Christodoulou (Cyprus): Cyprus has aligned itself with the statement made by the Swedish presidency of the European Union, and I will thus limit my statement to some issues of particular concern to my Government.

Cyprus achieved significant socio-economic growth between independence, in 1960, and 1974. In 1974 the Turkish invasion caused an upheaval of unprecedented magnitude, and the repercussions continue to affect Cyprus today. Despite the substantial economic growth achieved since 1974 and the considerable improvement in living and working conditions, the enforced division of the insular territory undermines the future of Cyprus and its sustainable development.

There is no doubt that the major problem facing Cyprus stems from the prolonged severance of the centuries-old settlement system, the natural environment and the social fabric of our multi-cultural society. This unnatural and anachronistic deformation lies at the heart of most other major problems in Cyprus, such as the sudden expansion of urban centres in the Government-controlled areas due to the influx of refugees from the occupied part of the island, the immense pressure exerted on scarce natural resources, the deformation of demographic characteristics of the population of Cyprus due to ethnic cleansing and the illegal influx of settlers from Turkey, and the destruction of a very rich cultural heritage. I also mention in this respect the systematic change of official toponyms in the occupied areas that have survived through centuries, in an attempt to eradicate the historical, cultural and national heritage of the area, in violation of the resolutions of the United Nations conferences on the standardization of geographical names.

Settlements in Cyprus are being affected by most of the typical problems facing the rest of Europe. The dominance of private cars, traffic congestion in the central parts of urban centres and so forth have become commonplace problems of our major cities. At the same time, rural settlements are experiencing a variety of problems. Those along the coastline are under severe development pressure related to tourism, and their environmental integrity is threatened. In contrast, in the

hinterland there are numerous villages suffering from the results of economic stagnation, population losses, inadequate infrastructure and insufficient social facilities.

Regional disparities in the Government-controlled area of Cyprus are being dealt with through the implementation of special development programmes, policies and projects promoting regional development and the bridging of the gap between more and less developed areas of the island. The Government of Cyprus is aware of the situation affecting the occupied part of the island and the considerable development gap in comparison with Government-controlled areas. Our Government is taking into consideration the needs of the whole of Cyprus, irrespective of the results of occupation. Plans for the social and economic integration of Turkish Cypriots with the rest of the citizens of the Republic are constantly under review and being updated.

Our Government fully endorses the principle of subsidiarity, a concept that is central to the management of contemporary human settlements. A well-planned process for the transfer of decision-making competencies, as well as resources, from the central Government to local authorities is being implemented.

In the first 15 years after the Turkish invasion, national housing policy focused almost exclusively on addressing the urgent need for providing decent temporary accommodation for one third of the population of Cyprus, which was forcefully displaced from its ancestral homes and settlements. Cyprus has succeeded in this task, and today 58,000 refugee families live in acceptable housing conditions while they wait for their eventual return to beloved places in the occupied part of the island.

The very active private sector, which dominates the housing market in Cyprus, is supplemented by quasi-governmental agencies, specializing in housing financing and housing development. These agencies have gradually expanded their activities, and they have succeeded in adequately addressing the needs of low- to medium-income groups.

Since the Habitat II Conference in Istanbul, housing policies and programmes are under constant review, in order to integrate contemporary approaches and objectives. Recently, my Government has taken steps towards integrating the multiple but rather fragmented housing programmes into a comprehensive national housing strategy. During the 1990s public policy focused on the implementation of planning legislation and the promotion of sustainable development. One of the major objectives of the planning system relates to the improvement of the living and working conditions of the population as a whole.

The state of the environment in Cyprus still allows for new considerations and priorities to be incorporated into national social and economic development policies. The Government, in cooperation with local authorities and local communities, has incorporated environmental considerations and quality indices into most sectoral policies, such as the tourism and service sectors, the use on renewable energy sources, the agricultural policy and so forth.

The Government of the Republic of Cyprus, recognizing the central role of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements in promoting the Habitat Agenda, has decided to increase its voluntary contribution by 50 per cent. The Republic of Cyprus is expected to join the European Union in the near future, and our Government is working intensively in order to achieve this ambitious objective.

Cyprus should be reunited, and all its inhabitants — Greek and Turkish Cypriots, Armenians, Latins and Maronites — should be entitled to enjoy human rights and should be offered the opportunity to cooperate with each other, in order to build their own common, peaceful and prosperous future.

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by His Excellency Mr. Ismael Hurtado Soucre, Minister of Infrastructure of Venezuela.

Mr. Hurtado Soucre: (Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, I wish to say that I am particularly pleased to be participating in this special session of the General Assembly to evaluate the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, which was adopted at Istanbul in 1996. I wish to affirm Venezuela's readiness to work earnestly and constructively in the work of this special session in order to help attain the lofty goals for which we are meeting here.

I want to take this opportunity to express appreciation for the work done by Ambassador Germán

García Durán, the representative of Colombia, who worked so effectively as Chairman of the preparatory committee in conducting the negotiations on the substantive aspects related to this session, thus making possible significant progress in the implementation of the commitments adopted at the Istanbul conference.

I would like to begin by referring to article 82 of the Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, which states:

> "Each and every person has a right to adequate, safe, comfortable and healthy housing, with essential basic services, including a habitat that humanizes family, neighbourly and community relations. The progressive satisfaction of this right is the shared responsibility of male and female citizens and the State in all of its spheres. The State will give priority to families, and it will ensure the means for them, especially those with limited resources, to have access to social policies and credit for the construction, acquisition or expansion of housing."

As a Venezuelan, I feel moved to confirm that there is complete consistency between my country's new Constitution and the objective of this special United Nations Assembly on human settlements. This undoubtedly promotes the review of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, which emerged in Istanbul in 1996. I am very pleased that the United Nations is gathering together in New York representatives of member countries to continue to study the complex problems of human habitat and to find solutions for the benefit of our peoples and nations.

The evolution of State policies in this respect has generated a qualitative and quantitative leap for present and future generations and has provided sufficient motivation to continue the march of development and human progress. In fact, there has been considerable variation in the way in which one views how to attend equitably to demands for a more dignified life. It has been accepted that providing adequate housing depends not only on State action but also on participation by the private sector, by non-governmental organizations and by communities themselves.

In Venezuela the constitutional article I earlier quoted has given rise to the design and implementation of an integral housing policy that reflects all concerns in this area, including the environment. In Venezuela today, we have implemented special programmes and policies to improve conditions in urban centres and rural areas, including indigenous areas. Our Constitution requires equal attention to that matter, respecting the primacy of the individual, of his or her needs and participation in attaining housing and a pleasant environment in general.

Those who attended Istanbul still remember that unforgettable session. I must confess that the sentiments expressed by some participants surprised and thrilled me to such an extent that our presence at this international forum includes in each of its proposals the clamour for a dignified space, one more economically viable, more environmentally sound and more just in social terms.

Moreover, Venezuela is very proud of the nearly concluded draft law of land ownership, which is moving our people towards a more dignified and more human life. They are increasingly supporting this Government policy, through which people feel they can participate directly in their own destiny.

Venezuelans are frequently heard to say: "We need support and friends — not intermediaries who will confiscate our words". Fortunately, the call of our people has been heeded by a Government that understands that the people deserve to be heard. The Ministry of Infrastructure of Venezuela bases its work on, among other things, providing an appropriate, clear and organized physical environment to the community for the development of its activities. Therefore, we will certainly be providing a better standard of living for our inhabitants and respecting their rights as citizens, their rights to access to land and housing.

It is my hope that in New York the purposes established in Istanbul will be enhanced and strengthened with the combined efforts made by the Member States of the United Nations in the last five years. Understanding the dignity of the human being guarantees the continuity of our efforts, so that the earth will continue to be the suitable habitat for humankind and that this same understanding will enhance the hope for a better world.

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by His Excellency Mr. Jacques Adiahenot, Minister of State, Minister of Habitat, Town Planning and Land Registration of Gabon.

Mr. Adiahenot (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): First of all, let me say what an honour and a pleasure it is for me to speak to you today, to address you on behalf of my country, Gabon, in this Assembly. I would also like to say how very much we appreciate the United Nations role in its ongoing quest for peace and the promotion of development.

Five years after Istanbul, this session presents an opportunity for us to review and appraise progress made, to identify obstacles and to contemplate, if necessary, new approaches.

We recall that the second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements adopted the Istanbul Declaration and the Habitat Agenda. These two instruments contain recommendations on the main themes that were discussed — namely, viable human settlements in an urbanizing world, and decent housing for everybody.

In keeping with these recommendations, my country has sought to conduct a policy of urban management that adheres strictly to this framework. Among the actions Gabon has undertaken since that time, I might refer to the fact that we have created, within the Ministry for Infrastructure, a general urban affairs department. We have established a national committee for Habitat. We have set up at the national level a unique association for the mayors of Gabon. We have strengthened partnership between the Government, local elected officials and civil society. We have also promoted community infrastructure pilot projects, funded by the World Bank. These projects have definite social advantages and are aimed at creating community jobs; promoting small and medium-sized businesses in the building industry; improving living conditions by building community infrastructures in poorly integrated districts; and enhancing administrative capacities for public works at the level of municipal technical services.

The most important action undertaken was the adoption of an urban development strategy funded by the World Bank: Gabon's urban policy declaration. Let me reiterate to the World Bank the sincere thanks of the President of Gabon and of my Government for its efforts.

Gabon's urban policy declaration is based on an unvarnished assessment of the situation, which has revealed uncontrolled urban sprawl in Gabon; a deteriorating public infrastructure and environment; inadequate transportation and urban services; and insufficient financial resources for urban development.

Gabon's new urban policy, which was adopted on 26 January 2001, highlights our Government's determination to improve the contribution made by cities to economic growth, to step up the fight against poverty and to strengthen good governance in our municipalities.

Likewise, the new urban policy has set the following priorities: promoting and developing an urban economy that can sustainably support economic and social growth; providing the urban sector with a framework and an environment conducive to the development of economic activities and the influx of private capital; controlling urban sprawl; improving the living conditions of urban populations, in particular in the poorer neighbourhoods; and building the administrative capacities of towns to prepare them to assume greater responsibility.

These goals reflect the recognition of the primary role played by cities, where more than two-thirds of our population lives. These goals cannot be realized without bold and innovative institutional and administrative reforms.

Following all of these in-depth reforms, our new urban policy will encourage global approaches and concrete actions in the field, leading to better urban administration and helping meet the needs of our citizens, taking into account current macroeconomic constraints as well as foreseeable changes in the global economy.

The implementation of such a policy requires significant and reliable funding. However, given our heavy debt burden, Gabon — like other developing countries — cannot cope with the situation alone. That is why we hope that our various partners will continue and strengthen their cooperation.

Before I conclude, I should like once again to thank the United Nations and to encourage it, through the Commission on Human Settlements, in its continuing quest to develop policies and programmes through which we can constantly improve the living conditions of our people.

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Hovik Abrahamyan, Minister of Territorial Administration of Armenia.

Mr. Abrahamyan (Armenia) (*spoke in Russian*): It is a great honour for me to address this special session of the General Assembly for this review and appraisal of the progress made in the implementation of the Habitat agenda.

On behalf of the Government of the Republic of Armenia, I should like to express the hope that this historic meeting will represent a major milestone of productive cooperation. My country attaches great importance to the documents adopted in June 1996 at the international Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), and we have begun to elaborate and gradually to implement measures that seek to translate into reality the main principles for the sustainable development of human settlements.

My Government has adopted a programme for the gradual elaboration of overall plans for cities in my country, the implementation of which will promote the development of human settlements in the Republic and step up the process of urbanization of Armenia.

In recent years, following the destructive earthquakes that struck Armenia, certain geological processes have occurred that have exacerbated the situation. This is having a particular impact on transportation services. In addition, the Government has devised a programme to combat landslides.

One of our priorities is providing our people with housing. This has become particularly important following the Spitak earthquake and because of the huge flow of refugees pouring into Armenia as a result of the Nagorny Karabakh conflict. Right now 45,000 families are homeless. New housing is being built, and new and alternative mechanisms are being used to provide people with houses, based on the principle of targeted financial assistance to our citizens.

Because of the economic recession, there has been a significant drop in the number of jobs, and unemployment is on the increase. In order to ease social problems in Armenia, a system of minimum social guarantees is in operation. We have also worked out a strategy for a strategic interim programme for poverty reduction. As a result of the continuing blockage of Armenia's transportation routes and its socio-economic difficulties, many problems facing refugees remain unresolved. More than 60 per cent of the citizens deported from Azerbaijan left behind their property, their homes, their apartments, their savings, and have thus far not received any compensation. The number of houses that Azerbaijanis have left behind in Armenia is about 30,000, but the number of houses left behind by Armenians in Azerbaijan is 92,000. Azerbaijanis have received from the Government of Armenia compensation totalling $110 million, whereas the overwhelming majority of those fleeing Azerbaijan — that is to say, our compatriots — have not received any monetary compensation from the Government of Azerbaijan.

The Government of Armenia has repeatedly raised this question of compensation for the property that the refugees had to abandon. Unfortunately, no progress has been made in this area. We need to resolve this issue in accordance with international agreements through bilateral talks and pacts. Because of the acute housing shortage, our Government has worked out a programme to provide deportees with housing, the cost of which has been $54 million. As a result, 13,000 refugee families have received housing.

I should like to take this opportunity to touch on the crucial problem of Lake Sevan, the largest freshwater basin in the Caucasus, which has vital importance for my country. The ecological situation of Lake Sevan should become the focus of attention and concern at both the national and international levels. This problem should be given due attention, because the eventual loss of Lake Sevan could lead to an unprecedented ecological disaster.

In recent years, international cooperation in urban planning and the development of human settlements has been increasing in importance and will provide greater opportunities for close cooperation between cities and human settlements.

In its implementation of these programmes, my Government has been cooperating closely with international organizations, in particular with the Black Sea Economic Cooperation organization, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United States Agency for International Development, the World Bank, the Lindsay fund, the European Union's programme of Technical Assistance for the Commonwealth of Independent States, the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements and the United Nations Development Programme, and on the bilateral level with the Governments of the United States, Germany, Japan, India, Greece, Cyprus, Korea and several other countries.

I wish in conclusion to reiterate my hope that this special session will encourage sustainable urban planning in a future marked by close cooperation.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Kimmo Sasi, Minister of Foreign Trade of Finland.

Mr. Sasi (Finland): My delegation fully supports the statement made earlier by the Minister for Housing of Sweden, who spoke on behalf of the European Union. I would, however, like to draw attention to some issues of special interest to Finland on this important occasion regarding the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda.

This review is taking place parallel with the Millennium Assembly. In the Millennium Declaration our heads of State or Government resolved to achieve a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by the year 2020, as proposed in the Cities without Slums initiative. We need to keep that commitment in mind during the present review of the Habitat Agenda.

The challenges set forth in the Habitat Agenda are of immense importance in today's world. We are witnesses to rapidly increasing urbanization, a phenomenon that has moulded our living environment like no other man-made development in the history of mankind. Despite enormous investment in urban development, housing conditions in many areas of the world are insufficient, and the direction in which conditions are developing is not necessarily positive. The reason is that poor economic development and rapid population growth are widespread in today's world.

On the other hand, many cities with equal resource bases have turned out very differently owing to varying development policies. To a larger extent, we should be evaluating the positive and negative features of various policies and approaches, and learning from and disseminating the resulting information. The thematic committees at this special session support such goals. I also believe that existing international cooperation and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) can play an important role in this field.

In line with the spirit of the Habitat Agenda, Finland promoted the right to adequate housing in a 1995 amendment to its constitution. In that legislation, the right to housing is not guaranteed, apart from specific exceptions, as a justifiable right. However, what is underlined is the supportive role of public authorities. Additionally, local authorities must take steps to improve housing conditions that particularly benefit the homeless and those whose housing conditions are inadequate.

A key problem worldwide is the division of cities into high-income and low-income areas, which has led to great social and financial problems. Finland has, as a central issue in housing policy, made concerted efforts to ensure a social mix of inhabitants in all residential areas. Various measures have been applied to achieve this, for example locating social and other housing in the same areas.

Local authorities are central to success in meeting many of the challenges set by the Habitat Agenda. In Finland, municipalities have played a key role. With decentralization, individuals have the opportunity to take part in the development of their communities. This takes place, for example, through democratic participation in municipal decision-making. Decentralization also gives local authorities a high level of financial independence. That independence allows municipalities to act for themselves.

In Istanbul, five years ago, Finland underlined the important linkages between human settlements development and global environmental issues, especially climate change. The significance of regional and community structures in diminishing emissions of greenhouse gases has been acknowledged. Finland is working to curb urban sprawl by integrating new development within existing city structures, and by promoting an environmentally friendly transportation system. We are also working hard to decrease air pollution and increase the efficiency of our energy production systems. For example, during the last two decades, nitrogen and sulphur dioxide emissions have been reduced by 70 per cent in Helsinki, but energy production has increased steadily. Highly developed technology has brought the efficiency of our combined heat and energy production to more than 90 per cent. That technology is used for both district heating and cooling. Finland's experience shows that air quality can be improved without negative effects on production.

We believe that our deliberations on the Habitat Agenda will be an excellent forum for focusing on and developing the future of our cities and human

settlements. We look forward to this special session as an excellent opportunity to give political support to the continued implementation of the Habitat Agenda. We hope that the participants in this special session will leave New York with a feeling of confidence that they can influence the outcome of development, and with a vision of how to do so.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Ricardo Gorosito, Vice-Minister of Housing, Environment and Land Management of Uruguay.

Mr. Gorosito (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): I wish first of all to congratulate you, Sir, on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at this special session, and to recall the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), held at Istanbul in 1996, at which I was unanimously elected Rapporteur by the countries represented at the Conference.

During the 1990s, Uruguay, like other countries in South America, opened up to the demands of a globalizing world. During that period we began a series of seemingly unavoidable economic adjustments. At the same time, and in anticipation of the predictably negative impact of those changes on Uruguayan society, social policies were developed to mitigate the inevitable dislocations. Within that framework, following the Habitat II summit, Uruguay brought its public policies in the areas of housing, land-use planning and the environment into line with the integrating concept of Habitat.

Our national Government adopted a number of innovative strategies to deal with the consequences of uncoordinated actions in the field of human settlements, by strengthening regional forums; diversifying lines of access to housing, with a special emphasis on channelling direct public subsidies to the most disadvantaged sectors; launching major projects for the protection and preservation of the environment; and promoting urban master plans in coordination with local governments.

In terms of its regional policies, Uruguay came out solidly in support of the Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR) process. To that end, the Government, in coordination with local administrations and with technical cooperation from France and South Africa, developed strategic plans to promote our country's physical integration into the region.

Mr. Andino Salazar (El Salvador), Vice-President, took the Chair.

My delegation stresses the relevance of the Regional Plan of Action on Human Settlements and of the support it has received, which we acknowledge as an essential strategic platform. We also stress the importance of implementing the recommendations approved in the Declaration of Santiago last October, as well as the considerations expressed at the Meeting of Ministers and High-level Authorities of the Housing and Urban Development Sector in Latin America and the Caribbean.

At the subregional level, mention should be made of the South-Western Uruguay Strategic Plan for the construction of the bi-national bridge over the River Plate linking Argentina and Uruguay. In the extreme east of the road axis, urban planning in the cities of the region bordering Brazil is further testimony to the drive towards integration. The central region of our country, historically lagging in development, is currently the beneficiary of a regional development and land-use planning project.

Activities in the public sector have been directed during this period mainly towards older age groups with limited resources and at addressing the growing problem of unplanned settlements. To that end, a low-cost housing programme has been launched for the benefit of non-working low-income groups. Under this programme, beneficiaries receive lifetime benefits of excellent quality housing, located preferably in central and intermediate areas of cities. In order to ensure the sustainability of the system, dwellings are administered and maintained by the State.

The State is also seeking to counter the phenomenon of unplanned and makeshift settlements in various ways, inter alia, by making available to potential squatters large numbers of lots with infrastructure services, a supply of materials and technical assistance through non-governmental organizations, which will increase the supply of legally available urban land; by repopulating consolidated areas of cities that were being depopulated, which will promote, inter alia, the repopulating of an urban area with considerable installed capacity and patrimonial value, as in the case of the historic neighbourhoods of Montevideo; and by creating a guarantee fund for leases that will facilitate the rental of under-occupied housing stock, in the first instance, to young people.

Advances in the protection of natural areas, biodiversity and sustainable development have been made in the wide coastal regions of the River Plate, the Atlantic Ocean and maritime lagoons.

The main elements of the commitments undertaken in the national plan for Habitat II have been undertaken by the national Government and most local administrations. However, these social policy actions have failed to reverse the trend towards the deterioration of many urban areas as a consequence of unemployment, the restructuring of traditional economic sectors and marginalization.

In conclusion, and consistent with the fundamental values of social democracy, of which Uruguay has been an example and a spokesperson in the concert of nations, our Government reiterates its firm commitment to the future revitalization of the Habitat Agenda as an instrument for channelling the civilizing mission of the first few decades of this century towards the restoration of equity and justice, so that when we speak of humanity as a family, it is not merely a figure of speech.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Salvador Gomila, Vice-President of the National Institute of Housing of the Republic of Cuba.

Mr. Gomila (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): Since Istanbul, the evolution of global indicators on human settlements and housing has not been at all encouraging for the so-called third world countries, as we can from reports for this event, including the report of the Executive Director of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) herself. The dramatic realities go far beyond what any statistic can express.

The rapid process of urbanization and population growth experienced by our world in recent decades has given rise to the enormous figure of 6 billion inhabitants. There has, however, been no corresponding development of agreements and promises of better solutions to the critical problems of housing shortages and environmental protection, among others, which are graver today than ever.

In the Latin America and the Caribbean region, the most urbanized in the world, these processes have been characterized by insufficient social investment and an increase in urban segregation, marginality, insecurity of land rights, violence, limited access to social services and a deterioration of the environment. All of this has been aggravated by the frequent occurrence of natural disasters. The reality of 2001 is no better for our region than that of 1996, when we met in Istanbul.

The principles and commitments undertaken by Governments in Habitat II represent a glimmer of hope for the millions of human beings living in conditions of poverty and deteriorating environments and lacking proper and healthy housing.

The decline in international cooperation assistance from the most developed countries and the clear trend towards eliminating or reversing some of the basic principles and commitments formulated five years ago in Istanbul jeopardize these achievements. Governments must therefore be unswerving in their efforts to preserve the provisions of the Habitat Agenda and to advance resolutely towards their practical implementation.

Our country, in the midst of considerable resource restraints and the tightening of the economic, trade and financial blockade that has been maintained for over 40 years, is working to make the right to housing effective and to ensure the implementation of the principles, commitments and plan of action arising from the Habitat Agenda.

Our population has guaranteed access to the basic services of education, health care, culture, sports and more for all citizens. We have supplied drinking water through aqueducts to all rural settlements and have electrified 96 per cent of the country's housing. There are financial and loan facilities to give the population access to housing being built through state channels, with subsidies amounting to over 50 per cent of cost, free of property tax and with full ownership security. More than 85 per cent of families own their own homes.

Given the special significance and importance of this special session, we reiterate here our desire for integration and cooperation in the field of housing and human settlements with all countries, in particular those of Latin America and the Caribbean, through the Meeting of Ministers and High-level Authorities of the Housing and Urban Development Sector, for the implementation and consolidation of the Regional Plan of Action.

Let us join our will and efforts to stem the growth of poverty in order to ensure a better future for our peoples that is more humane, with real fairness and equal opportunity for all nations and their populations, regardless of size or economic or military potential. Let us once again trust in man, in his wisdom, in his common sense, in his capacity to act as a human being in order to make reason and justice the basis, in general terms, for relations among peoples, to eliminate the marginality, poverty and other calamities that, today more than ever, afflict human kind.

The Acting President *(spoke in Spanish)*: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Ali Hamad Al-Shamsi, Under-Secretary, Ministry of Public Works and Housing of the United Arab Emirates.

Mr. Al-Shamsi (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): I have the honour, on behalf of the State of the United Arab Emirates, to extend my congratulations to the President and the members of the Bureau on their election at this special session of the General Assembly. I wish you all every success.

Despite many initiatives and efforts made by Governments and partners to implement the recommendations of the Habitat Agenda, reports and recent international statistics affirm that over 1 billion of the world's people continue to live without adequate housing and lack the most basic health and social services. That fact — in addition to increasing poverty, civil and regional conflicts and interference in the internal affairs of States — are among the obstacles preventing many countries, and in particular developing countries, from realizing their development plans and programmes. Individual Governments and the international community must therefore make greater efforts and take further measures to achieve peace, security, stability and development.

Under the leadership of His Highness Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al-Nahyan, the United Arab Emirates has made human settlements one of its most important priorities. My country has implemented the principle of decentralization in its management structures. We have also adopted development policies based on the free market economy, enabling strategies, and the principle of partnership between federal and local government, the private sector and all other partners. We have done this with a view to developing the housing sector and human settlement so as to make it possible to meet housing needs and provide stability and a dignified life for our citizens.

Through those policies, the United Arab Emirates has been able to make progress in the area of housing and human settlements by building and developing new and modern villages and cities in which human beings enjoy high levels of municipal services. Those services include the provision of adequate housing equipped with basic services and utilities, as well as health, social and educational services.

The United Arab Emirates has also focused its attention on disseminating best practices, which are the main instruments in monitoring and evaluating progress in the implementation of national plans, and on creating awareness of issues of population and human settlements. Since 1995, the Government of Dubai has awarded the Dubai international prize for best practices in the improvement of housing conditions. This prize, worth $400,000, is awarded every two years for the best 10 practices.

The United Arab Emirates has given particular attention to this special session and values the efforts made in the preparations for it. The United Arab Emirates considers the draft declaration on cities and other human settlements that will be adopted by the special session to be an important document for achieving the aspirations of the world's peoples. We would therefore like to express our support for the objectives contained in the declaration, while at the same time affirming the urgent importance of bearing in mind the distinct cultural, social and philosophical heritage of all peoples and their political systems.

As we examine the progress made in sustainable development, human settlements and the provision of adequate housing for all, there are still many regional and international conflicts and cases of occupation in the world — in particular in our Arab region and in the Gulf. Iran's occupation since 1971 of the Emirate islands of Abu Musa and Greater and Lesser Tunb, and its continuing attempts to change the demographic and historical character of our three islands, represents a clear violation of our sovereignty and of the principles of the United Nations Charter and international law. From this rostrum we call upon the international community to urge the Islamic Republic of Iran to respond to the many repeated peaceful initiatives and appeals made by the United Arab Emirates to end its occupation of our three islands through serious

bilateral negotiations or by bringing the case before the International Court of Justice.

Israel's continuing violations and its brutal and systematic daily crimes against the Palestinian people — including the destruction of houses and farms, the confiscation of land, the expansion of illegal settlements and the eviction of Palestinians to make them homeless — are contrary to the principles and objectives of this special session. We therefore call upon the members of the international community, and in particular the leading countries of the Security Council, to assume their legal and historical responsibilities and to bring political pressure to bear upon the Israeli Government to immediately stop its aggression and criminal acts against the Palestinian people, acts that are direct violations of international humanitarian law. They should also bring pressure to bear upon Israel so that it implements the agreements it has concluded with the Palestinian side and ends its occupation of Arab and Palestinian territories — including the Holy City of Jerusalem and the Syrian Golan — and completes its withdrawal from all Lebanese territory.

We would once again like to reaffirm our full support for the rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination and to the establishment of their own independent State — just like any other people — with Holy Jerusalem as its capital. The achievement of just and comprehensive peace in the region requires the implementation of the relevant resolutions of international legitimacy.

Finally, we hope that this special session will achieve its desired objectives and that it will contribute to the happiness and prosperity of humanity.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Gian Nicola Filippi Balestra, Chairman of the delegation of San Marino.

Mr. Balestra (San Marino): Allow me to congratulate the President and thank him for organizing this special session of the General Assembly. The massive attendance of the highest representatives of Member States confirms and underlines the attention that our Governments pay to the global problem of human settlements.

The Government of San Marino is particularly aware of the importance of this special session on urbanization and housing. We know that the implementation of the Habitat Agenda depends not only on a global and thorough knowledge of the problems, but also on an immediate and efficient response from our Governments. These two relevant and necessary steps must be interlinked and coordinated.

Climate changes have left some land unproductive and have provoked the exodus of rural populations towards the cities. This rapid increase in the urban populations has made living conditions in the cities unbearable. Many overpopulated cities have no communications networks, no water-pipe systems, no schools, no health-care centres and no other forms of infrastructure. The increase of industrial production, on one hand, has created new job opportunities, but, on the other hand, it has not helped the natural environment or the living conditions of some urban centres. All this accounts for environmental damage of huge proportions, which we are all called to respond to quickly and efficiently. But we are caught in a vicious cycle, which must be tackled in all its aspects in order for it to be fully broken.

San Marino hopes that the international community will be able to create new incentives to ensure the permanence of rural populations on the land and to stimulate the process of counter-exodus: from the city to the countryside.

We will have to reconsider agriculture. In the countries where this is possible, we will need to develop policies that sustain the process of converting conventional agriculture into biological and integrated agriculture.

The environmental question has particular relevance at the global level. It is also very important today in San Marino.

The history of human settlements in the Republic of San Marino, notwithstanding its 60 square kilometres of territory, in substance is not very different from that of other countries. After the Second World War, the territory underwent a fast and radical transformation. Like other territories, San Marino had to face the exodus from the countryside, but, lacking big urban centres, it had to cope with an agglomeration process that caused the creation of small centres, each characterized by different functions. Recent building development turned the various villages into a large agglomeration, causing them to lose their original

character, but that agglomeration did not become a new urban form.

Thanks to its limited population and recent economic well-being, the Republic of San Marino does not have to face the problem of housing at the moment. To prevent this problem and to deal with the present situation, we adopted some political and legal measures. For instance, we analysed the new need for new homes; we established a policy to make home purchasing more accessible; we adopted measures to facilitate and promote the offer of homes for rent; we promptly answered the need for temporary homes for the disadvantaged social classes; and we created public green areas, infrastructures, parking and public spaces.

San Marino has to tackle another serious problem: safeguarding its territory, taking into consideration that the excessive increase of buildings in already densely populated and congested areas could compromise the environmental balance and entail serious difficulties. It is therefore imperative to apply balanced town planning in the future, focusing on sustainable development and on analysis of the impact on the natural environment.

The Republic of San Marino is convinced that efficient implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements can be achieved only through the real conviction that both the problem and its solution are a global concern. Our action must be well defined and must envision the restructuring of our social and economic systems. Most of all, it requires a new policy of international cooperation, with the common good of the planet as its main goal, instead of the particular interests of a few countries.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I call on His Excellency Mr. Hiroo Kinoshita, Special Adviser to the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport and Chairman of the delegation of Japan.

Mr. Kinoshita (Japan) (*spoke in Japanese; interpretation provided by the delegation*): First of all, I would like to express my profound gratitude to all those involved in the preparation of this important session. It is an honour for me to represent the Japanese Government at this significant event.

Five years have passed since we met in Istanbul to reaffirm the spirit of the Vancouver meeting of 1976. However, we are facing difficult problems in human settlements, such as rapid urbanization, environmental issues and a widening gap between the rich and the poor. Now, so that we may bring humankind to prosperity in the new century that has just begun, it is very timely for us to send powerful messages of action for the alleviation of human settlement problems, which is essential for peace and the development of humankind.

Based on a spirit of partnership, in Japan we have worked aggressively towards the concrete realization of the Habitat Agenda through public involvement. Let me introduce the main activities.

First, the issues of human settlements are extremely broad and varied, and they include economic, social and cultural factors. So it is necessary to plan national land policies in order to solve the problems. In Japan, in order to improve the human settlement conditions, national land policies are aimed at brightening the lives of individuals, ensuring safety and security, the creation of a beautiful and favourable environment and the formation of diversified regions and localities.

Secondly, as half the Japanese population lives in the country's three metropolitan areas, we make efforts to promote twenty-first-century urban renaissance projects that target the revival of cities from the standpoint of environment, disaster prevention and globalization, in order to enrich the lives of urban residents.

Thirdly, based on the eighth five-year housing construction plan, which was established by the Japanese Government in March 2001, we will work mainly on such basic tasks as the construction of good-quality housing stock that meets the diverse needs of the nation and the construction of a vibrant housing environment that supports an ageing society with fewer children.

As for land policies, we will pursue the realization of the effective use of land by promoting such policies as the development of underutilized or unused land in city centres.

Fourthly, water problems, including water shortages, the spread of water pollution and the large-scale floods, are emerging all over the world and are resulting in such things as food shortages and the spread of epidemic diseases. This may lead to a serious

situation in the near future as the increase in population and rapid urbanization progress.

The Third World Water Forum will be held in the Kyoto area in the year 2003 to discuss water problems. I would like to call for the active participation of all present , from all over the world, in that forum.

Fifthly, I would like to talk about disaster prevention, for which Japan strongly appealed in Habitat II, based on the invaluable lessons learned from the great earthquakes.

The World Conference on Natural Disasters 2001 was held in February, in Awaji, located in the Hyogo prefecture, which experienced the great Hanshin-Awaji earthquake. The Conference confirmed that it was necessary to establish strategic guidelines for restoration, and an agreement was reached to enhance the global disaster prevention framework in order to implement global disaster prevention strategies. Let us promote international cooperation and partnership in the area of disaster prevention in the future and work towards the realization of that agreement.

Six years ago, when Japan experienced the great Hanshin-Awaji earthquake, we received warm support from all over the world. I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation for that support.

Finally, I would like to note the Japanese Government's international involvement towards realizing the Habitat Agenda. The Japanese Government has supported projects to improve living conditions in low-income areas by establishing the Trust Fund for Human Security at the United Nations.

Approaches in which residents themselves actively participate in improving living standards are very effective for the development of poverty areas. We give consideration to these participatory approaches involving regional residents when we cooperate with poverty reduction projects. Such projects include job training, creating employment opportunities and making basic social services available. As part of its effort, the Japanese Government has established funds for poverty reduction in the framework of the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank, through which grant assistance is provided.

Furthermore, partnerships between various parties are important in implementing the Habitat Agenda. The Japanese Government will continue to assist non-governmental organizations (NGOs) operating in developing countries and provide them with financial assistance, such as NGO project subsidies and grant assistance for grass-roots projects, in order to ensure cooperation directed at economic and social development.

The Japanese Government welcomed the opening of the Habitat Asia and Pacific regional office in Fukuoka in 1997, and cooperates in resolving settlement issues in the region. We cooperate through the Japan-Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) Cooperation Fund, with the aim of implementing the Kitakyushu Initiative for a Clean Environment. That initiative was adopted at the fourth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific, which was hosted by the Government of Japan and organized by ESCAP. We have also actively supported the initiative by establishing a national support framework.

In the twenty-first century, as we are becoming increasingly aware of environmental issues and the finite nature of the earth's resources, all nations must cooperate to bring about a flourishing and bountiful world whose inhabitants can enjoy economic, as well as spiritual, well-being. I would like to conclude by assuring the Assembly that the Japanese Government is committed to strengthening its efforts to play a role in international society, as well as to implementing its domestic human settlement policies.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Gediminas Šerkšnys, Chairman of the delegation of Lithuania.

Mr. Šerkšnys (Lithuania): I should like to thank the President, on behalf of the Lithuanian delegation, for organizing this special session of the General Assembly in order to review and appraise the implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II). Sharing experiences and best practices with other countries gives us new impetus to achieve Habitat II goals.

While aligning ourselves fully with the statement made by the European Union, I would also like to share with the Assembly our national experiences with regard to this issue. Lithuania associates itself with the principles of the draft declaration on cities and other human settlements in the new millennium. However, I would like to stress not only that our commitments should be clear and carry the message that our goal is

to improve living conditions for the poor, but also that concrete actions must be taken.

Implementing the outcome of the Habitat II Conference has been a constant goal of the Lithuanian Government. Both the ongoing process of the country's accession to the European Union and its aspirations to increase universal well-being are being pursued through macroeconomic activity, which creates preconditions for the implementation of the outcome of Habitat II.

Common European processes are having a permanent influence on Lithuania. The structure of Lithuania's gross domestic product is becoming similar to that of the Western European countries. The private sector creates over 70 per cent of the gross domestic product of Lithuania. Our economic transformation has reached its final stage, and trends in economic growth are being observed. The quality of life is improving, and long-term investment in the housing sector is increasing.

A network of urban areas has already developed in Lithuania and shows a balanced settlement structure, with different functions distributed among urban centres. Even at lower levels, the settlement structure appears to be balanced. Such a situation creates favourable conditions for the integration of urban and rural areas, as well as their development under new social and economic conditions.

Although Lithuania's transition to the market economy left its mark on housing construction, new and better quality materials that help to reduce energy consumption have begun to be used. Instead of 336 dwellings per 1,000 inhabitants, with 20 square metres per person — the situation in 1995 — there are now 356 housing units per 1,000 inhabitants, with an average of 21.5 square metres per person, and 97 per cent of the units are private. Investment in new housing construction represents about 9.2 per cent of total investments; however, the percentage set aside for social housing should be increased. Lithuanian municipalities are constantly being urged to assume greater responsibility for social housing construction.

The number of newly built single-family houses has increased noticeably, and the overall quality of buildings has improved. Since a considerable number of houses, especially those in the cities, are large panel houses with poor energy efficiency, investment in renovating and modernizing them is constantly increasing. In order to fulfil the commitment of the State-supported housing programme and to facilitate conditions for the acquisition of dwellings through purchase, construction or renovation, the Lithuanian Government took a number of measures under its strategic housing policy. About 20 laws, and twice as many by-laws and regulations, relating to housing and human settlements have been enforced in Lithuania during the past 5 years. The Civil Code, which entered into force in Lithuania this year, was an important legal act for improving residential property management. The formation of homeowners' associations in privatized, multifamily houses is being promoted, and legislation relating to the activities of homeowners' associations is constantly being improved. A new law on residential building construction associations is currently being drafted.

The Lithuanian Government has drawn up a new policy on the acquisition of residential property, in which emphasis is placed on existing problems and measures for the acquisition, reconstruction and rental of municipal dwellings. By enlarging budget assignments for loan subsidies, State support has been strengthened for young families — those whose members are under the age of 35 — for housing acquisition.

The Housing Loan Insurance Company began its activities last year. The company provides loan insurance of as well as guarantees to banks. It has made it possible for people to receive housing loans with a down payment of only 5 per cent.

After the reform of the cadastral and real estate register system and the creation of a new mortgage infrastructure, the supply of mortgage loans increased significantly. The Energy Efficiency in Housing pilot project was successfully finalized with funding from the World Bank and implemented by the Housing and Urban Development Foundation. The Foundation, which was established in 1996, provides loans for homeowners' associations and schools. Preparations were being made for negotiations with the World Bank for an additional loan for housing renovation needs in Lithuania.

We are pleased to be able to express our satisfaction with the fruitful cooperation with the Economic Commission for Europe, as well as the United Nations Development Programme office in Vilnius. The Country Profile on Housing in Lithuania,

which was prepared in cooperation with an international team of experts, was published in the English and Lithuanian languages. It was presented both to governmental institutions and to the Society for the Discussion of Housing Improvement in Lithuania. The strategy addresses the main problems of housing renovation, suggests ways to implement energy efficiency measures and makes other practical recommendations. Cooperation with corresponding ministries from the Netherlands, Poland, Germany, Sweden and our Baltic neighbours influenced a number of challenging ideas related to implementing the provisions of the Habitat II documents.

We consider the spirit of Habitat II to be alive and well. It inspires us to undertake further steps for the implementation of the Habitat outcome.

The Acting President *(spoke in Spanish)*: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Bernd Niehaus, Chairman of the delegation of Costa Rica.

Mr. Niehaus (Costa Rica) *(spoke in Spanish)*: The elimination of poverty, the sustainable development of human settlements and the provision of decent housing for everyone are fundamental duties both of the international community as a whole and of each and every one of our Governments. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights reminds us, in article 25, paragraph 1, that

> "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing ...".

As a result, a profoundly humanistic approach should be taken to the implementation of the Habitat Agenda and of the draft declaration on cities and other human settlements in the new millennium, which we will shortly be adopting. Their goal, based on the inherent dignity of each individual, is to promote and ensure the full enjoyment of fundamental rights.

Cities are one of the highest achievements of civilization. They bring together all the energies and efforts, arts and knowledge of humankind. They offer an ideal setting for creative and constructive interaction among people. Only in cities is it possible to find the immense range of opportunities and options needed for the full development of human beings on the intellectual, emotional and spiritual levels.

Regrettably, cities also feature the most abject living conditions. Poverty, hunger, disease, insecurity, unemployment, discrimination, the lack of basic services and the effects of conflicts and natural disasters cast their menacing shadows over our cities. How many children live in the street? How many old people die forgotten? How many families suffer from hunger? Cities can be profoundly dehumanizing. It is very easy to be blinded by their bright lights and to not want to see the suffering of their inhabitants.

Poverty is the main obstacle to the sustainable development of human settlements. If we do not have the necessary economic resources, it is impossible to improve the living conditions of our citizens. The challenge of poverty is multifaceted. In order to tackle it, we must face and meet the manifold needs for food, health care, housing, drinking water, education, job training, employment, fair wages, productivity, competitiveness and access to opportunities. We must also combat structural obstacles that intensify the problem of poverty or prevent us from overcoming it. These obstacles include financial imbalances, lack of capital for productive and social investment, restricted access to international markets and natural disasters that have devastating effects on the poorest and most vulnerable economies.

At the same time we must tackle the danger of unbalanced growth, which darkens the future with the spectre of a greater gulf between the poorest and the richest. The lack of equity in access to opportunity intensifies social conflict, reduces governability and engenders social violence. For this reason, it is essential for us to take effective measures to create fairer and more equitable societies. In this regard, the design and construction of the infrastructure of urban centres should support economic development by stimulating productive activities and the generation of employment.

In recent years we have witnessed repeated natural disasters in the Central American region. Although those disasters have arisen from natural events such as hurricanes, earthquakes and torrential rains, their unfortunate effects have been accentuated by deficiencies in urban development and growth. The human, economic, political and social cost of tackling environmental emergencies is immense. For this reason, urban design must reduce the vulnerability of settlements to such disasters. We must adopt building techniques that minimize the effects of earth

movements and prohibit building in areas prone to flooding or avalanches. An environmental policy that will guarantee sustainable land management, prevent deforestation and erosion, and ensure proper water management is the best protection against natural disasters.

The sustainable development of urban centres requires the elaboration of development plans that take into account the available natural resources, the present and future needs of the community, waste and pollution management, access to basic services and transportation and environmental impact assessments. These technical aspects must go hand in hand with a continuous process of democratic and transparent consultation with the communities concerned, so as to respond properly to their wishes and expectations.

Today, I am glad to be able to say that Costa Rica has an active grass-roots programme for building housing that is designed to guarantee the fundamental right of all Costa Ricans to decent housing. My country's social programmes seek to give all families a safe home, full access to basic water, electric and waste-disposal services, and fair access to high-quality health care and education. We are convinced that only in this way — through a firm political commitment — will it be possible to give everyone the decent living conditions that they deserve.

The Acting President *(spoke in Spanish)*: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Marc Nteturuye, Chairman of the delegation of Burundi.

Mr. Nteturuye (Burundi) *(spoke in French)*: Allow me first of all to address, on behalf of my delegation and myself, my sincere congratulations to the President of this twenty-fifth special session and to the other members of the Bureau, in whom this Assembly has placed its full trust. I feel sure that with their wisdom and rich experience, this significant session will be crowned with real success. I assure them of the support of my delegation for the success of our work.

I would also like to pay a vigorous tribute to the Secretary-General and to the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements for the fine preparations for this session and for the quality and richness of the documents that have been produced. The strategies and most relevant recommendations that have been formulated during the preparatory sessions for this special session have shown to humanity as a whole the importance of human settlements for economic and social development during this new millennium.

With a population of roughly 7 million, Burundi faces both a high population density — more than 250 inhabitants per square kilometre — and a population growth rate that is among the highest on our continent. The population is essentially rural; the level of urbanization in Burundi is only 7 per cent. This is why the Government of Burundi instituted a voluntary policy aimed at developing secondary urban centres in order to alleviate demographic pressure on the scarce agricultural lands.

Burundi adopted this policy in order to avert the harmful effects that could result in the near future, on the one hand, from the exodus of rural populations lacking land to cultivate, and, on the other hand, from the need to provide for the massive return of refugees once the peace agreement, signed on 28 August 2000, is effectively implemented.

In order to do so, it is necessary to equip the country's secondary urban centres with the tools for urban planning and management, to establish shared facilities and basic infrastructure through the high-intensity work programme and to promote non-agricultural jobs through cottage industries and other income-generating activities.

The Government of Burundi considers housing a fundamental human right equal to those of food and health. Before the crisis that my country has been undergoing since 1993, the Government, with the help of the people themselves and the assistance of bilateral and multilateral cooperation, had undertaken a vast programme for the improvement and production of housing, both in the urban centres and in the countryside. Such remarkable progress was made that if the same level of performance had been maintained, the availability of decent housing would have exceeded the rate of 80 per cent by the end of the year 2000. Unfortunately, the crisis strongly affected economic and social development. Not only did it take tens of thousands of lives and result in several hundred thousand refugees and internally displaced persons, but it also caused the destruction of a great deal of housing. This sad situation has shown the extent to which housing is a fundamental human right, as important as life itself.

To deal with this situation that has deeply affected human settlements, and in application of

recommendations made at various preparatory meetings for the Istanbul Conference, the Government of Burundi has drawn up a national programme that focuses mainly on the following areas of action: reconstruction of the social fabric torn apart by the socio-political crisis; the return and social reintegration of displaced and repatriated persons; the reconstruction of socio-economic infrastructures and housing destroyed by the war; the implementation of a policy for balanced development in urban centres; and the promotion of housing, related services and the protection of the environment.

However, this programme can be fully implemented only in an environment of peace and security. This is why the Government, with the support of the international community, initiated and piloted a peace process, through the inter-Burundi negotiations, in order to achieve reconciliation among the sons and daughters of our country. Global and inclusive, and through the mediation of Nelson Mandela, these negotiations led to a political accord on 28 August 2000; however, peace will come only when war is over and that accord can be implemented.

With this agreement, the Government is convinced that its Habitat plan of action will be able to be well implemented. The recent round table of donors, which met in Paris in December 2000, gave us great hope. That conference was a success. Almost $440 million was pledged to our country to support the Government in its programme of consolidation of peace and national reconstruction.

I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate, on behalf of my Government, our sincere gratitude to friendly countries and international organizations for the support and sympathy they have shown us. My Government hopes that the aid promised will be made available as soon as possible.

Certainly, the assistance pledged in Paris is significant; but it is still not enough in view of the huge needs for reconstruction. This is why we are launching another appeal to the international community to redouble its efforts to come to the assistance of our Government and people in the implementation of our national plan of action. The Government of the Republic of Burundi is hopeful and optimistic regarding the generosity and solidarity of the international community.

Before concluding, I wish to affirm once more, on behalf of my Government, the need to revitalize and strengthen the capacity of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, which must continue to play a leading role in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda.

The Acting President *(spoke in Spanish)*: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Ángel Edmundo Orellana Mercado, Chairman of the delegation of Honduras.

Mr. Orellana Mercado (Honduras) *(spoke in Spanish)*: The Honduran delegation is honoured to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your election as President of this special session, and we are grateful for the statement made by the Secretary-General at the opening of the session.

Internal migration from rural to urban areas is a principal cause of the current problem of human settlements. It is a historical phenomenon common to all peoples. But today, when globalization has combined with the traditional factors that have driven that phenomenon, adding elements that make it a problem affecting all peoples equally, its manifestations are no longer merely the subject of government policies; rather, it has acquired the status of a fundamental issue in relations among countries.

The pressure exerted on large cities by migration from rural areas and the establishment of industries that pollute the environment give rise to major dysfunctions in the economies of developing countries, and particularly in the policies and programmes designed to provide for human settlements.

Every day our countries face, with increasing concern, crises stemming from the inadequacy of our basic services, such as electricity, drinking water, good health and so forth. They make significant efforts to cope with the destructive effects of disorderly population movements and industrial activities, particularly environmental pollution, which generates a large part of our most serious problems.

But recently a new factor has been added to the worsening of this problem: nature. Disasters of apocalyptic dimensions have wreaked havoc on entire nations, either destroying their productive capacity or dealing it a severe blow.

Our country, Honduras, has been among these victims. The Government whose term is ending began

its activities by tackling the disastrous consequences of Hurricane Mitch; and throughout its term of office, its key priority has been to bolster the nation physically and morally, an endeavour in which it has received the unconditional solidarity of civil society.

Our problems were multiplied in an instant, particularly those of human settlements. Entire towns disappeared when the blind forces of nature were unleashed; and many sectors in rural and urban areas were razed or severely affected, particularly the most vulnerable. Protecting the health of those affected, providing shelter to those who had been left at the mercy of the elements and creating the necessary conditions to reactivate the economy were factors that dictated the State's activities.

Our housing problem is still one of the key ones; but, notwithstanding the magnitude of the disaster and the scarcity of our resources, we can state with satisfaction that very positive and resolute progress has been made in this area, with, of course, the generous and effective support of the international community. Those affected have been given shelter, pending settlement in permanent locations. The environment is a priority in all of the Government's programmes and projects, and our productive capacity is now operational, if not fully at least to a significant extent.

Of course, the range of outstanding issues is considerable, but the foundation has been rebuilt and, despite the obstacles, the rest of the structure is being erected with enthusiasm and determination.

My delegation subscribes to the universal principles which we hope will be adopted in the declaration which is currently being negotiated.

The Acting President *(spoke in Spanish)*: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Abdallah Baali, Chairman of the delegation of Algeria.

Mr. Baali (Algeria) (*spoke in French*): We are here today in New York to undertake together a rigorous and clear-sighted assessment of what has been accomplished since Istanbul in the area of human settlements, and to reflect together on the measures that need to be taken in order to meet the challenges of sustainable development, protection of the environment, promotion of human rights and the eradication of poverty. In that way we can provide for all of the inhabitants of our planet a life in conditions of dignity and security, to which they have a legitimate right.

Since time immemorial, man has associated the ideal model of community organization — the city — with the design and construction of human settlements.

In Algeria, the size of a kasbah or village is carefully adapted to natural resources; irrigation systems are set up so as to maximize their judicious and cost-effective use; and roadways and construction are designed in a way that allows people to enjoy the outdoors and the sun while respecting their neighbours. This translates, in terms of human settlements, into an entire culture that is based on community life.

At the same time, a dual set of rules prevails. The first is a veritable urban code governing housing relations with one's neighbour, and the second governs the conditions for the use, maintenance and development of common areas by appealing to community solidarity, which we call *touiza*, *taoussa* or *tiwizi*.

In our modern world, these values are now sought after. Citizenship, shared responsibility, partnership and governance — are these concepts, so fashionable today, not the fundamental expression of the principle that human settlements are, above all, a community based on solidarity?

It seems to us even more timely and necessary to recall the principle of solidarity given that throughout the world living conditions in cities, the increasing number of homeless persons and of slums, the deterioration of the environment, rising poverty and the renewed spread of childhood diseases are showing no sign of improvement.

Furthermore, the high concentration of people forced by abject poverty to the periphery of cities and into high-risk areas is contributing to housing problems and leading to greater insecurity in the urban areas of the developing countries.

In this respect, the Istanbul Agenda offers useful and realistic perspectives and frameworks for cooperation. We must use those to our advantage.

Given the immensity of the challenges facing us, genuine international solidarity is required. It must be based on massive development assistance, debt cancellation or the reconversion of debt into housing assistance, the fight against poverty and the

preservation of the environment. It must support and consolidate the actions that have been taken at the national and regional levels.

Mass urbanization, with its links to poverty, in turn gives rise to a number of questions. These are made even more difficult by the fragility of governance and local financing, inadequate urban management and archaic and obsolete forms of management that require, as an integral part of a human-rights-based approach, decisive measures to achieve greater involvement on the part of local authorities and of agencies responsible for housing management.

The need for housing security is also contributing to the emergence of a fresh approach to housing policy, whose goal is to enhance access by the poor and, increasingly, by women not only to better housing but also to public services, thereby guaranteeing the right to reasonable employment, political representation at the local and national levels, and genuine gender equality.

Finally, local governance, which involves a transfer of power to the grass-roots level, also implies a recognition of the rights of the various segments of the population to participate directly and effectively in decisions that affect them.

For us, the increasing number of significant events taking place at the global level that focus on the areas of the environment, resources and cities constitute a fresh opportunity to recall our collective responsibility in these areas.

Today, the requirements of globalization and the legitimate quest to meet the needs of the majority in the areas of employment, housing, health care and education seem inexorably to propel us towards a development that is based on quantity and which is tearing apart our cities and harming our towns.

Our response to the principal challenges of the third millennium should be based on the enhancement of our creative capacities, with a view to moving towards universality without losing ourselves in it and to adapt our responses to newly emerging needs, while drawing inspiration from the best aspects of our culture and our traditions.

In this spirit, here in New York, we must work to translate into reality the two major objectives in the area of settlements: adequate housing for all and sustainable human settlements development in an increasingly urbanizing world that daily is becoming more and more of a global village.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I give the floor to Mr. Rashid Alimov, Chairman of the delegation of Tajikistan.

Mr. Alimov (Tajikistan) (*spoke in Russian*): The twenty-fifth special session of the General Assembly has a very important task before it: to objectively review and appraise the progress that has been made in the five years that have elapsed since the adoption of the Habitat Declaration on Human Settlements in Istanbul, in order to determine guidelines for future progress based on our experience at both the national and international levels.

It is particularly important now, in this era of globalization, when active efforts are under way to agree on parameters for the future development of this phenomenon which would provide for a genuine and just distribution of the benefits of the new economy among countries and all the segments of the population.

In our view, during the last five years, much has been achieved, but clearly a great deal remains to be accomplished.

Tajikistan is a firm supporter of the goals of the Habitat Agenda. Our Republic is making a tremendous effort to provide decent housing for all, to create conditions that will allow for the participation of society in the quest for solutions to key issues, and to achieve gender equality.

But my country faces considerable difficulties in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. These are a result of the civil conflict, which has left tens of thousands of people without housing, and of the transition to a market economy, exacerbated by economic decline and the lack of social protection. Further, we lack the wherewithal for investment, which is a very serious problem for us. Hence, outside assistance is absolutely vital for my country. We place high value on the outcome of the recent Tokyo conference of donors to Tajikistan, with support from the United Nations and the World Bank, on sustainable post-conflict peace-building in Tajikistan. We hope that the outcome of the Tokyo meeting will spur development in my country so that we can engage in a stable peace process.

The Government of Tajikistan intends to do its utmost to attain the goals of the Istanbul Conference. Our top priorities at present are to eradicate the aftermath of the conflict in urban areas and to engage in post-conflict economic reconstruction. Here, we believe it most important that among the results of this special session be a decision by the international community to increase its efforts to assist countries that have suffered from conflict in attaining sustainable development for their cities and other population centres. Peace and sustainable development in Tajikistan are in the interest not only of my country and the entire Central Asian region, but also of Europe and the entire international community. It is important to secure social justice for the entire population, especially for its most vulnerable sectors.

The goals of the Agenda include the attainment of gender equality in employment and education, along with the advancement of women and the protection of the family and of mothers and children. Despite its difficulties during this transitional period, Tajikistan is formulating a national mechanism to ensure equal opportunity and equal rights, especially in education and employment. My Government has developed programmes to combat poverty. Implementing them will enable us to resolve a number of the problems that have arisen in line with the Istanbul Declaration.

Another priority is to strengthen the health system in urban and rural areas: the health of our people is the most important precondition for the implementation of the goals of the Istanbul Conference. Sustainable development hinges on the ability of countries to ensure an adequate level of health. The health system suffers from insufficient financing and a lack of qualified staff. Deteriorating economic conditions lead to declining sanitation in populated areas and to epidemics, especially of water-borne diseases. We hope that this year's conference on fresh water in Tajikistan will enable the world community to focus on the issue of access by all to drinking water.

The provision of decent housing for all and the question of human settlements demand urgent measures to seek new sources of financing, especially from the private sector. We welcome the provisions in the Declaration relating to towns and human settlements in the new millennium.

I wish in conclusion to stress that we feel certain, regardless of our difficulties in attaining the Istanbul goals, that with motivation, well-conceived national policies, and solidarity and support from the international community, we will be able to put in place the conditions needed to reach them.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Nasser Al-Kidwa, Chairman of the delegation of Palestine.

Mr. Al-Kidwa (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): I wish at the outset to inform the Assembly that members of the Palestinian delegation who were to have traveled Palestine have been prevented from coming here to participate in the work of the special session, owing to the closure imposed by Israel, the occupying Power, on the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem. Needless to say, we condemn this most forcefully.

In our written statement, copies of which are available to participants, we discuss the importance of this special session and of implementing the Istanbul Declaration and the Habitat Agenda. We go on to address the most important problems, especially those facing the developing countries, with special reference to Africa.

The Palestinians too suffer from the many problems that face other peoples, especially in developing countries. The most serious issue before us relates to the colonization of occupied Palestine, whose people face special problems requiring urgent solutions. For 34 years the Palestinian people has been chafing under the yoke of Israeli foreign occupation. The occupying authorities' oppressive policies and practices have an adverse effect on all aspects of life, including social and economic aspects, and jeopardize the very existence of the Palestinian people.

The gravest aspects of the colonization of the occupied Palestinian territories are the transfer of the occupying Power's civilian population to the occupied territories, the establishment of Israeli settlements and the ongoing confiscation of Palestinian land. The occupying Power continues to this day to build and expand settlements, transfer more settlers, build bypass roads and confiscate more Palestinian land and natural resources to fuel these activities, which are all illegal under international law.

The purpose of those settlement activities is to alter the legal status, geographical nature and demographic composition of the occupied Palestinian territories. Today there are more than 200 Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem. Despite the peace process, no Israeli Government has ceased its illegal activities in this sphere. The present and long-term consequences of these Israeli practices are gravely harmful to the living conditions of the Palestinian people, to their efforts to achieve sustainable development and to the prospects for peace in the region. The impact of Israel's illegal settlement activities has been particularly harsh in occupied East Jerusalem, where for decades the Israeli Government has been expropriating Palestinian land and building and expanding settlements at a feverish pace in total disregard of international law and relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions. Besides altering the city's municipal boundaries, the practices of the occupying Power — which are aimed at the Judaization of the city — have changed the geographical nature and demographic composition of Jerusalem, and have affected its historical and cultural character.

Another human-settlements issue that has been on the Palestinian agenda for decades is the plight of Palestine refugees and displaced persons. Since 1948, Palestine refugees, now numbering some 3.8 million, representing the world's largest and longest-standing refugee population, have lived in what were intended to be temporary camps and shelters, awaiting their return to their homes and property. For more than 53 years, these refugees have lived in severely cramped and crowded dwellings, lacking such basic services as adequate sanitation systems and paved roads and surrounded by an underdeveloped and dilapidated infrastructure. In fact, the refugee camps of Gaza are among the most densely populated stretches of land in the world. Moreover, the rates of poverty and unemployment among the Palestinian refugee population are very severe and have continued to rise astronomically during the renewed turmoil afflicting the Palestinian people under occupation. In this regard, our statement necessarily touches on the practices of the occupying Power since 28 September 2000 and their catastrophic consequences.

We should like to take the opportunity of this special session to reaffirm the need for the international community to exert greater efforts to accelerate the process of resolving the ongoing and tragic plight of the Palestinian people. Work must be done to solve the many problems that continue to hinder the implementation of the Istanbul Declaration and the Habitat Agenda, and in particular to eradicate poverty and discrimination, promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all and provide for such basic needs as education, nutrition, stable life expectancy, health care services and, especially, adequate shelter for all. The first, most important and urgent step in this regard must be to bring an end to the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian people.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.

United Nations A/S-25/PV.2

General Assembly

Twenty-fifth special session

Official Records

2nd meeting
Wednesday, 6 June 2001, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Holkeri ..... (Finland)

The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Agenda items 8, 9 and 10 (*continued*)

Review and appraisal of progress made in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda

Note by the Secretary-General (A/S-25/3 and Add.1)

Further actions and initiatives for overcoming obstacles to the implementation of the Habitat Agenda

Declaration on cities and other human settlements in the new millennium

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Fernand Boden, Minister of Middle Classes, Tourism and Housing of Luxembourg.

Mr. Boden (Luxembourg) (*spoke in French*): It is an honour for me to have this opportunity to address participants at this special session of the General Assembly devoted to the Habitat Agenda, adopted by more than 170 States.

First I would like to thank the Conference secretariat for the excellent organization of this important event, which represents a strong gesture and an essential contribution towards the fundamental objective of the United Nations: human development.

The Government of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg contributes sustainably to the implementation of the Habitat Agenda at both the national and international levels.

The situation of Luxembourg domestically in terms of housing compares very well to other western States. In fact, thanks to strong sustained economic growth and a record increase in domestic employment, accompanied by an increase in the resident population, Luxembourg is the only western State to envisage the possibility of an increase in the resident population on the order of approximately 30 per cent in the next 20 years. For several years now the Government has noted stagnation, if not a reduction, in the production of housing.

In that context, marked by a shortage of housing compared to the demand — which has also had a strong impact on prices — the housing policy represents a priority for the Government. As announced in Istanbul, Luxembourg endeavours to reconcile population development and economic growth with a sound environment, a harmonious natural and human environment. Appropriate means have been deployed in order to protect natural reserves, ensure water quality, limit air and noise pollution and manage industrial and household wastes better.

In the context of its global strategy, Luxembourg actively pursues efforts to ensure sustainable and harmonious development for the countryside and urban areas. The objectives are manifold and ambitious, and the right of each individual to adequate housing is a priority. The essential means implemented to this end are the following.

The national plan for sustainable development, which includes the housing policy, establishes a

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coherent political, economic and social strategy with the objective of ensuring sustainable development of the economy and society.

The master programme for land development is a guiding instrument designed to integrate sectoral policies and regional and communal policies. It defines objectives for urban and rural development and ensures to national and communal authorities the means necessary to elaborate their normative plans.

The Habitat book is a kind of housing X-ray, prepared by an expert who analyses the stability, hygiene, comfort, ecology and, above all, thermal properties of housing. In cases of noted shortcomings, this expert proposes specific measures for improvement and renovation.

The Government has also mapped out an ambitious programme aimed at reconverting old industrial steel-making sites in areas reserved for new human settlements. This undertaking underscores the global dimension of Luxembourg's strategy in development and the creation of settlements.

In terms of good administrative governance, the Government of Luxembourg desires a more participatory democracy, favouring the implementation of democratic structural reforms and creating a closer link between the citizen, the policy, and the State. The Government envisages a referendum on constitutional issues. But the Chamber of Deputies will also have before it a draft law governing the popular initiative, allowing for a specific number of voters to introduce a bill.

Furthermore, in a participatory society a citizens' representative or a mediator, responsible for analysing citizens' grievances vis-à-vis the public administration and endowed with a right of initiative, should have his place.

Luxembourg supports international and intergovernmental action. As a founding member of the United Nations and a founding member of the European Union, the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, within the scope of its resources, has always endeavoured to accord to this role its due political content. As an example, Luxembourg ranks approximately twenty-fifth, in absolute terms, among those who contribute to the major organizations of the United Nations system working for development. Since 2000, Luxembourg has reached the objective of devoting 0.7 per cent of its gross national product to official development assistance.

Development cooperation is an important element in Luxembourg's bilateral presence abroad. The Government focuses development cooperation on actions aimed at combating poverty and strengthening respect for fundamental rights. Access to housing is in the forefront of basic human rights that are taken into consideration.

Access to housing affects human development. Human development is the best guarantee for peace and stability in the world. States share the responsibility to ensure implementation. Let us all together assume this responsibility.

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Gline Clarke, Minister of Housing and Lands of Barbados.

Mr. Clarke (Barbados): I am honoured to be given the opportunity to address this special session of the General Assembly in respect of the review of the Habitat Agenda.

Five years have passed since we met in a similar forum in Istanbul to formulate the Habitat Agenda, and many of us came away from that Conference with great expectations for its implementation. Nevertheless, we were realistic enough to know that implementation would be challenging, especially in an environment of limited resources. Therefore, in conducting this review, we should not be disheartened by any shortfall in achievement since 1996, but we should focus instead on charting a forward path, towards accelerated implementation.

I welcome the opportunity to highlight some of my country's experiences since 1996. I am pleased to report that the Government and people of Barbados have taken this review very seriously, and all the stakeholders have participated actively in the preparation of the national report. The National Habitat Committee has been expanded, and participation has been at a very high standard.

At the second session of the preparatory committee, concern was expressed that five years was an insufficient period for a review to be conducted. Be that as it may, I certainly believe that this review is timely since it comes at a juncture when the Centre for Human Settlements is being reorganized and when the phenomenon of globalization is becoming entrenched.

In this regard, I can report that the National Committee has identified a number of new issues that have become a challenge to the realization of the twin goals of adequate shelter for all and sustainable human settlements development in an urbanizing world.

Foremost among these, perhaps, is the rising cost of land. As Barbados is a small island, its land resources are at a premium. The demand for land is getting progressively greater, and as a result, the price of land has escalated. In addition, the availability of land along what is known as the urban corridor, stretching from the north to the south of the island, has been substantially reduced. This trend has inflated the cost of land, even in the interior. However, through legislation, the Government has protected the segment of the population that traditionally rents land by making it possible for people to purchase their housing plots for 10 cents or, in some cases, $2.50, per square foot. Lower income first-time home owners can also obtain mortgages at 6 per cent interest. This has so far proved to be a great success.

We must be ever-conscious of the fact that land and property markets in small island States are not as well developed, and do not function as efficiently, as those in more developed countries. Accordingly, some form of Government intervention is often needed to protect vulnerable persons and groups in the interests of social equity and of achieving the Habitat goal of sustainable shelter for all. For that purpose, Barbados has established a land-banking programme through which the Government systematically and compulsorily acquires and vests land in the national housing corporation and other relevant social agencies. Those agencies have the responsibility to ensure that those whose needs are not met by the formal markets can actually establish tenure at an affordable cost. I should point out that there are different elements to this programme, including the use of private sector initiatives and other participants in the formal market.

Since 1996, much progress has been made in rural and urban development. In 1997, we established the Rural and Urban Development Commissions. The Urban Development Commission has the mandate to fast-track the implementation of an urban renewal programme. The work of that agency has so far met with much success, such as the upgrading of houses in a programme to deal with derelict housing in traditional settlements, the provision of roads and footpaths to facilitate access and street lighting, the disbursement of loans and the transfer of land titles to tenants at subsidized prices. The Commission's work targets the poor and is, indeed, an indispensable element of my country's poverty alleviation programme.

Where possible, we have sought to tap into the positive aspects of globalization as it relates to Habitat issues. We are currently examining alternative building technologies. These are cheaper than, but just as durable as, traditional local materials. They are also hurricane-resistant, which is a vital consideration for countries like Barbados, which face a perennial threat to their human settlements from naturally occurring events such as hurricanes.

With respect to housing legislation, we have in the past concentrated on land tenure and the enfranchisement of long-standing tenants. However, as we undertook the review of the Habitat Agenda, it became more and more apparent that there was greater need for the protection of house tenants, too. Accordingly, we are now examining our laws with a view to ensuring that poor households are not forced to rent sub-standard housing. In addition, we have instituted a building code to improve housing stock generally. In closing, I should like to say that I remain confident that this special session will serve to place the entire Habitat Agenda in its proper perspective, as far as implementation is concerned. Now is the time for action, if the impact of the Habitat II Conference is to be fostered and maintained.

Barbados is anxious that the output of this review should provide a significant impetus to our goals of achieving adequate shelter for all and sustainable human settlements.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency The Honourable Albert Shabangu, Minister for Housing and Urban Development of Swaziland.

Mr. Shabangu (Swaziland): On behalf of the delegation of the Kingdom of Swaziland, I am greatly honoured to address the General Assembly at this twenty-fifth special session on the overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the outcome of United Nations Conference on Human Settlements.

I should like to take this opportunity, right at the beginning of my statement, to reaffirm my country's commitment to the goals and principles of the Habitat Agenda. To this end, I should like to reflect on, and

share with this Assembly, my country's accomplishments in moving towards adequate shelter for all and sustainable human settlements development in an increasingly urbanizing global village.

His Majesty's Government has put in place an enabling legislative and policy framework for achieving sustainable human settlements development. This has been followed by both programmes and projects. To this end, the Kingdom of Swaziland, in partnership with the World Bank, is currently undertaking the upgrading of informal human settlements in our two cities. This initiative is envisaged as benefiting over 15,000 families. I am, indeed, happy to report that this project has not only improved living conditions, but also enhanced access to land, as well as credit, for the marginalized urban poor. Many aspects of this project were greatly inspired by the spirit of the Habitat Agenda.

I am happy to report that, in recognition of some of the innovative elements of the project, in July 2000 it was one of 18 such projects presented with a special development award by the World Bank. The projects that received this award were considered the best of the best, as they were selected from a pool of over 380 projects funded by the World Bank — projects that had been already recognized for their overall quality.

In addition to those projects, the Swaziland National Housing Board, which is a parastatal body under my ministry, is currently providing over 1,000 units for rental and 500 units for ownership to low and middle-income earners.

All of that has been achieved by working with our partners, with whom we have formed strategic alliances. These partners include, but are not limited to, local communities, public utilities and the communities that are affected by such projects — housing boards, non-governmental organizations and private sector groups.

On the issue of urban governance, my Government has introduced democratic elections for local authorities. My Government is committed to building the capacity of local authorities. To this end, the increasingly active Swaziland National Association of Local Authorities (SNALA), and the Local Authorities Association of Managers, were formed and played an important role in influencing and advocating national policies and legislation. Although still very young, the SNALA has also joined the African and International Unions of Local Authorities.

Notwithstanding the achievements that I have mentioned, Swaziland faces a number of political, cultural and financial challenges. One challenge we face for example, has been dealing with the secure land tenure concept. While the Habitat concept is very clear with regard to what it entails, in our country it touches on political and cultural issues that can be approached only with great diligence and care. However, through broad consultation, progress is being made.

Another challenge is the HIV/AIDS pandemic, which has resulted in a new phenomenon of households headed by orphaned children. The housing of these orphans calls for untested innovation.

Another challenge that we faced in implementing the Habitat Agenda was the lack of financial and technical resources available to the people, on the one hand, and to the Government on the other. I believe this is a problem not only for Swaziland, but for most developing countries.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to recognize the support of our international partners. In this connection, we sincerely express our appreciation to the United Nations Development Programme, the Commonwealth Local Government Forum, the African capacity-building fund, the National Association of Local Authorities in Denmark, and the African and International Union of Local Authorities. However, if we are to adequately fulfil the objectives, goals and aspirations of our people, there remains a critical need for more financial assistance. We can win only if we all work together as countries and nations.

In conclusion, allow me to emphasize the Government of Swaziland's commitment to the implementation of the Habitat Agenda and my delegation's hope that this special session will fulfil the mandate it has been entrusted with, and that it will adopt the declaration which will guide our work.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Ovídio Antônio de Angelis, Special Secretary for Urban Development of Brazil.

Mr. De Angelis (*spoke in Portuguese; English text provided by the delegation*): I am honoured to represent Brazil at this important conference. It is my pleasure to convey President Fernando Henrique Cardoso's warm greetings and to express his

confidence that the debate we are embarking on will yield new initiatives, fresh ideas and practical proposals for addressing the many challenges confronting our cities.

We have achieved significant progress since the Conference on Human Settlements held in Istanbul in 1996. Daily experience has shown, however, that striking a balance between the goals of poverty eradication, social justice and environmental concerns and providing equal opportunities for all remains a daunting challenge.

To begin with, the international climate has been largely unfavourable. Throughout the 1990s economic growth was modest, especially in Latin America, which suffered the constraining effects, in both fiscal and financial terms, of successive global financial crises.

Despite the negative domestic impact of this adverse international situation, the Brazilian Government was able to move ahead in implementing the Istanbul commitments. The political determination embodied in the outcome of the Habitat II Conference remains alive and has been a central plank in Brazilian Government's policy over the years. Significant social investments have been made in the fields of health, education, water quality and sanitation, job creation and the fostering of social inclusion — the latter by targeting vulnerable groups such as youth, women and senior citizens. The dedicated and decisive contribution made by civil society to initiatives aimed at alleviating social exclusion should be underscored.

Awareness campaigns, community support, the monitoring of the outlay of federal funds for education and training, and partnerships between the federal Government and local governments are all highly positive signs of how the three tiers of government in Brazil, together with civil society, can make things happen.

Thanks to this joint effort, which brings together volunteer work and partnerships between a wide range of social actors and institutions, including the private sector, much progress has been achieved in Brazil. Life expectancy has increased both for men — to 69 years — and women — to 71 years. Infant mortality has declined to 24 per 1,000 live births in certain regions, while the national average has declined from 43 to 35. This rate is now very close to the goal of 33 per 1,000 set by the United Nations for the year 2000. As concerns access to education, 96 per cent of all Brazilian children between the ages of 7 and 14 are now enrolled in school.

The Brazilian Government is equally concerned with the sustainability of human settlements. Municipalities that present relatively low human development levels have been targeted through ambitious sustainable development projects. In partnership with the local community and private enterprise, the federal Government has sought to foster action in sectors offering high growth potential, including agriculture, trade or crafts.

A detailed record of the social advances achieved and of the initiatives developed in response to the commitments agreed to in the Habitat Agenda is available in the Brazilian national report prepared, with input from all the different social and political sectors, for the special session. That report, which is at the disposal of all interested delegations and of which we are proud, attests to our success in largely fulfilling this undertaking. Through it we wish once again to express Brazil's determination to persevere in actions geared to improving the living conditions of its people.

These numbers are eloquent. Yet much remains to be done in pursuit of the goal of equal opportunities, quality education and citizenship-building for all in every part of the country, including the more remote and isolated parts. We therefore reaffirm the understanding that the Habitat Agenda remains the major guiding light for the work to be carried out in all our countries in the fields of sustainable human settlements and adequate housing for all. This is an endeavour that we must all undertake with determination. We support the launching of the Global Campaign on Urban Governance and the Global Campaign for Secure Tenure, issues of primary importance for achieving the wider goals set out by Habitat: sustainable settlements and adequate housing for low-income families.

One of the challenges still to be addressed is the inadequacy of institutional and human resources in developing countries. There is a clear need to enhance technical and financial cooperation between developed and developing countries to strengthen institutions and local authorities.

We had the honour and pleasure to host the Executive Director of the Habitat Centre last month in Brazil. Mrs. Tibaijuka met with President Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Government ministers, as well

as the Governor of Brasilia. Mrs. Tibaijuka and I held a meeting during which she was briefed on the recent approval by the National Congress of a constitutional amendment whereby adequate housing is enshrined as a right of all citizens. In addition to visiting Brasilia, the Executive Director also got acquainted with the specificities of the situation in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, with whose Mayor she signed a bilateral cooperation agreement yesterday, to be implemented in collaboration with the Habitat Office for Latin America and the Caribbean.

It is my pleasure to reaffirm the Brazilian delegation's commitment to identifying the existing obstacles and the best means of overcoming them and to recognizing the new challenges before us and the need for creative answers to fulfil our aspirations for social justice, social inclusion and equal opportunities. These goals are being achieved as a result of a series of initiatives that President Fernando Henrique Cardoso has instructed his ministers to put into effect. I am convinced, Mr. President, that under your guidance, and with the cooperation of all representatives present at this session, we will achieve our common goal of providing an improved quality of life for our peoples.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Yu Zheng Sheng, Minister of Construction of China.

Mr. Yu Zheng Shen (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): At the beginning of the new century, we are gathered here at United Nations Headquarters in New York to hold a special session of the General Assembly on Istanbul+5. I would like to take this opportunity, on behalf of the Chinese Government, to extend sincere congratulations on the convening of this session and wish it complete success.

Since the Habitat II Conference five years ago, the Chinese Government has made serious efforts in fulfilling its commitments and implementing the Habitat Agenda. As a result, great changes have taken place in housing conditions and the environment, as well as in both urban and rural construction. In the past five years, about 6.47 billion square metres of housing has been completed in China at the annual rate of 1.29 billion square metres, of which 3.1 billion square metres has been constructed in the urban region. The per capita floor area in the urban region has reached 20 square metres. Through the reform of the housing distribution system, a new and market-oriented housing system has been established, which is suitable to China's specific conditions. The development of small cities and towns has been promoted. The urbanization rate has reached 36.09 per cent. An urban and rural planning and management system has also been established.

In the renewal of old towns and districts, the preservation and protection of historic and cultural sites, historic streets and the cultural heritage of different nationalities have been emphasized.

The fast development of urban infrastructures has been realized with the introduction of market mechanisms and the increase of investment. Urban pollution control, environmental protection, greening and ecological construction have been promoted.

The legal frameworks related to urban development and management have been improved. Great progress has been made in combating natural disasters, in post-disaster rehabilitation, in the return of cultivated land to forest and in conservation of ecosystems.

Social security systems have been established for vulnerable groups, such as the poor, the elderly and the disabled.

In order to realize the twin objectives of Habitat II and to implement the Habitat Agenda, the Chinese Government believes that economic development and poverty eradication are essential for the solution of human settlement problems. The international community should work together to promote economic growth, eradicate poverty and narrow the gap between the North and the South.

Since countries vary in terms of political systems, level of economic development, culture and tradition, it is impossible to adopt one unified method or model to deal with human settlement problems. The sovereignty and law of each country, as well as its policies, strategies, plans and priorities for human settlements, determined in the light of its national conditions and capabilities should be respected.

The development of human settlements should be sustained by a coordinated approach to population growth, the development of a productive force, the exploitation of natural resources and environmental protection. Improving the conditions of human settlements in developing countries is key to the success of improving human settlements globally.

Therefore, the developed countries should make efforts to narrow the gap between the North and the South in the common interest of all. They should also demonstrate their political determination and willingness to fulfil their commitments in financial assistance, technology transfer, capacity-building, market access and debt relief in order to strengthen the capacity of the developing countries in addressing human settlement issues.

Equal emphasis should be put on urban and rural regions in the development of human settlements. This development should deal not only with the construction and improvement of physical facilities but also with the cultivation and advancement of culture and moral values.

The initiatives and creativity of local authorities, non-governmental organizations, the private sector, women, youth and other Habitat Agenda partners should be mobilized. Their cooperation should be enhanced for the improvement and development of human settlements.

We believe that there is no doubt that the central Government plays an important role in the development of human settlements. At the same time, it is also very important to bring into full play the role and initiatives of local governments in addressing human settlements issues. However, any tendency to ignore national conditions and weaken the role of the central Government, while overemphasizing local self-government in the administrative system and politicizing the human settlements issue, will produce no positive result, but, rather, an adverse impact on the social stability and economic development of the developing countries, and will harm the development of human settlements.

The Chinese Government attaches great importance to full cooperation and exchange with the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UNCHS), the relevant international organizations and other countries.

Beginning this year, the Chinese Government has increased its contribution to UNCHS. It co-sponsored with it the successful international conference on urban construction and the environment that was held in Chengdu, China, last year, at which experiences of best practices in global human settlements were shared.

The Chinese Government has also decided to create a China habitat award, the winners of which will receive the habitat scroll of honour.

Looking to the future and the increasing economic globalization, it is clear that we need to narrow the gap between rich and poor throughout the world. We must achieve significant improvements in global human settlements. We must enable the developing countries to keep pace with the times, free themselves from poverty and make greater progress.

Let us work together to create a better tomorrow for the world.

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency The Honourable Algernon Allen, Minister of Housing and Social Development of the Bahamas.

Mr. Allen (Bahamas): It is indeed an honour and a privilege for the delegation of the Commonwealth of the Bahamas to attend this special session of the General Assembly, and for me to address the Assembly, on the question of the overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements.

We meet at a time when the population of our world has surpassed 6 billion. We meet at a time when the forces of globalization have transformed the relationship of nations. We meet at a time of unparalleled prosperity - and yet, we meet at a time of unparalleled disparity between those who are experiencing this prosperity and those who are hopelessly poor and marginalized. We meet at a time when our grand cities and opulent urban centres are juxtaposed to vast areas of hovels, slums and the homeless millions of people throughout the world.

We therefore commend the holding of this special session. The Bahamas is totally committed to the twin goals of adequate shelter for all and sustainable human settlements development in an urbanizing world.

The Bahamas is an archipelago of 700 islands and cays covering approximately 80,000 square miles, with a population of only 305,000. The total land area of the Bahamas, however, is approximately 5,382 square miles. Or 15,000 square kilometres. We are a relatively prosperous and peaceful nation, with a stable Government and a sound economy, supported on the twin pillars of tourism and financial services.

The archipelagic geography of the Bahamas presents significant challenges. Presently, about 70 per cent of the population resides in the capital island of New Providence, which has a land area of 80 square miles, or 1.5 per cent of the total land mass of the Bahamas.

The Government of the Bahamas has taken the following initiatives to diagnose the problems of urban development and sustainable human settlements in our small nation in several ways.

First, it has, in the year 2000, updated the 1984 housing report. The new report details the state of housing in the country and recommends specific solutions to address the rehabilitation of urban centres, funding, and availability and accessibility of land to low-income persons in need of affordable housing.

Secondly, it conducted the 2000 census of the population, which provides, among other things, much-needed information for the formulation of policies for the alleviation of poverty in all its manifestations.

Thirdly, we are presently undertaking a living-standards measurement survey to determine specific areas to be addressed within socio-economic groupings and communities in our nation.

The Assembly is aware that the Habitat II Agenda calls for all levels of government to work closely with representatives of civil society, especially those representing the urban poor. We realize that a sound economy is necessary for the allocation of resources, particularly from mortgage lending institutions for urban development. An ambitious investment restructuring and fiscal discipline, which reduced unemployment in the Bahamas from approximately 16 per cent to below 7 per cent within the decade, has resulted in many Bahamians of middle and low income qualifying for mortgage financing. As a consequence, home construction has reached an unprecedented high, primarily by the private sector, supplemented by Government programmes under the Housing Act and its Mortgage Guaranteed Loan Scheme for low- and middle-income persons and the elderly.

The Government of the Bahamas has waived customs duties for building materials in the remote and less developed islands of the archipelago for specific periods, so as to encourage persons in those islands and persons who wish to return to those islands to build dwelling homes far below the market cost.

The Government has launched an aggressive "rebirth" and "new birth" programme, designed to rehabilitate or cause the rebirth of the traditional communities, particularly in New Providence, the capital island, and secondly, in the case of the new birth thrust, to cause the creation of new housing communities in the urban centres of the Bahamas for low- and middle-income persons.

In particular, the Government of the Bahamas has assisted the business community, the churches and other non-governmental organizations in the provision of housing for low- and middle-income persons and marginalized groupings, particularly women and children in crisis.

We are particularly proud of the allocation and provision of homes in Government-sponsored housing subdivisions for the disabled and older persons.

With the decentralization of Government administration and the implementation of local government, there has been a significant, positive impact on urban development in our family islands. We are pleased to report that the Government of the Bahamas, within the last eight years, so as to provide security of tenure for many residents of our family islands, has conveyed more than 2,000 lots of land with marketable title to families throughout these islands.

The Mortgage Corporation of the Bahamas and the Department of Housing, through the Government Guaranteed Mortgage Loan programme, has caused several hundred homes to be built and owned by low-income persons who would otherwise have been excluded from home ownership, and this has been assisted by the raising of the limit of the guaranteed mortgage loan to both these groupings.

Despite our best efforts, we are confronted with small areas of urban degradation caused by absentee landlords; abandonment of traditional family houses by new suburban families; an influx of illegal immigrants with differing social values and standards of living; and families devastated by drug and alcohol abuse. We are, however, concentrating our focused resources in these areas along with a myriad of social partners and programmes inspired by the words of Nobel Peace Prize winner, philosopher and theologian the late Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who said:

> "When evil men plot, good men must plan. When evil men burn and bomb, good men must

build and bind. When evil men shout ugly words of hatred, good men must commit themselves to the glories of love. Where evil men would seek to perpetuate an unjust status quo, good men must seek to bring into being a real order of justice."

Indeed, we are seeking to bring into being a real order of justice in relation to adequate shelter for all and sustainable human settlements development in an urbanizing world.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Alain Hutchinson, Secretary of State for Housing of Belgium.

Mr. Hutchinson (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): I wish at the outset to congratulate the Bureau and you, Mr. President, on your excellent background work, and to thank the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, under the leadership of its Executive Director, Mrs. Anna Kajumulo Tibaijuka, for having successfully completed the preparatory process that will enable us to give fresh momentum to the Habitat Agenda.

The Belgian delegation fully supports the statement made on behalf of the European Union. I shall focus my comments on a few points to which Belgium attaches particular importance.

In 1948 the General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a common ideal for all peoples and all nations. The rights set out in the Declaration have been strengthened and broadened by a number of instruments, including the Habitat Agenda. In 1976, the Vancouver Declaration on Human Settlements, adopted at the first United Nations Conference on Human Settlements, declared that

> "Adequate shelter and services are a basic human right which places an obligation on Governments to ensure their attainment by all people". (*A/CONF.165/PC.1/INF.8, annex, sect. III, para. 8*)

But since 1976 the lot of the most vulnerable has not improved; slums have only spread. It was against the backdrop of that challenge that the Habitat Agenda was adopted at Istanbul in 1996.

The right to adequate housing for all is one of the two major priorities of the Agenda, and that basic right has been set out in the Belgian constitution since 1994. Our constitution provides that everyone has the right to a life consistent with human dignity, including the right to decent housing. That basic social right may be defined in this way: everyone has the right to decent housing in a decent neighbourhood, at an affordable price, and to enjoy secure occupancy.

In Belgium, which is a federal State, the implementation of this right, apart from certain of its regulatory aspects, essentially falls within the purview of the regions. The immediate effect of the constitution's text is to oblige the State and the regions to establish specific minimum guarantees to ensure respect for the dignity of all. This is more than a mere statement of intent; the text imposes a positive obligation to act: to create a right to housing through political means commensurate with the goal.

To act on this principle, the Flemish region in 1997 and the Walloon region in 1998 adopted housing codes. The housing code for the Brussels-Capital region is being prepared. These codes define how this right is to be implemented through a variety of regional institutions that are responsible for carrying out housing policy.

With a view to developing sustainable human settlements in line with the Habitat Agenda's second major priority, the federal and regional governments, following a series of integrating, participatory and inclusive processes, have adopted plans for sustainable development at the federal and regional levels. The federal plan deals, inter alia, with aspects related to poverty reduction, agriculture, biodiversity, energy and climate change. The regional plans focus on such elements as security, mobility, housing, strengthening the economic and social fabric, and promoting investment.

As a highly urbanized country, Belgium has long been assessing the challenge posed by the future of large cities. With a view to keeping our cities viable, the federal and regional governments, with the partnership of the inhabitants, are engaged in a comprehensive integrated policy in such areas as security, mobility, housing, strengthening the economic, social and cultural fabric, and encouraging new investment.

After the 1999 elections, the Belgian federal Government created a federal policy department for large cities. Among its priorities are the formulation and implementation of a policy for large cities. Most of the activities at the federal level are based on a

partnership among various authorities. The "city contract" is one of the tools the federal authorities have chosen to carry out its large-cities policy. That programme involves 11 Belgian cities and has specifically led to the carrying out of 116 projects. Our urban security policy too makes use of "security-and-society contracts" between the Ministry of the Interior and individual communes, which work together in a multidimensional partnership to combat delinquency; this involves a police presence and the prevention of situations that could give rise to crime.

Belgium's regions have all adopted comprehensive and inclusive housing policies. The Flemish region has created a social impetus fund to restore quality of life, combat poverty and promote well-being through a comprehensive approach to housing, mobility, the economic fabric, the integration of immigrants, *et cetera*. Through its housing code, the Walloon region has sought to provide a local anchor for housing policy by involving and giving responsibility to the provinces and the communes, along with a participatory approach reflected in the establishment of a High Council for Housing that brings together all the relevant actors. The Brussels-Capital region is restoring the continuity of the urban fabric through activities intended to revive underprivileged neighbourhoods and through the "blue" and "green" networks — which aim at restoring the continuity of surface waters and green spaces respectively.

Since Istanbul, Belgium's development cooperation has also taken better account of the urban aspect of development. This new comprehensive policy, intended to promote sustainable urban development in close harmony with rural development, requires additional funding. Belgium hopes also to expand its policy of decentralized city-to-city cooperation and the participation of actors in keeping with their specific cultures, especially with respect to urban planning and architecture. The Belgian Government has agreed gradually to increase to 0.4 per cent by 2003 the proportion of its gross national product devoted to assistance; a considerable portion of that increase will be devoted to the world campaign for housing security and for initiatives under the Local Action 21 programme.

It is Belgium's intention to continue to pursue the priorities of the Habitat Agenda when it assumes the presidency of the European Union, with respect, first and foremost, to housing and urban affairs, and through the promotion of cross-cutting consideration of these problems, to which only integrated policies can respond effectively. Promoting sustainable development and fighting social exclusion will be two priorities of the Belgian presidency. Specifically, the ministers for housing of the European Union will meet in Belgium on World Habitat Day to exchange experiences and good practices in the fight against exclusion.

Belgium is eager that the right to housing should be reaffirmed in any political declaration adopted at this special session. Housing is one of the most basic needs for human life. It is essential to life. We believe that the public authorities must ensure that everyone's vital needs are met. For those able to meet those needs themselves, the public authorities must provide sufficient habitable space. For those no longer able to house themselves or their families, the public authorities must provide effective assistance. This notion of the right to housing goes beyond the simple right to a roof over one's head. The public authorities must also see to it that everyone is housed in accommodation that, from the standpoint of safety, quality and space, is commensurate with the economic and social situation of the country in question.

As the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has recalled, endorsing the right to decent housing certainly does not mean that all can claim ownership of their accommodation. Governments have the right to make it possible legally and administratively for everyone to become an owner, but not the obligation to give a dwelling to every individual. They also have the obligation to provide adequate housing to the most vulnerable when they are unable to obtain it for themselves.

The Belgian Government hopes that at this special session Member States will, at the least, reaffirm their determination gradually to ensure full enjoyment of the right to adequate housing and renew their commitment to sustainable human settlements. If we fail to do that, we will be going back on our prior commitments; that would be unacceptable.

Moreover, we invite all our partners to look ahead to how we will follow up the declaration we shall be adopting and to how we shall build on our achievements, inter alia by making the best use of the synergy between the Habitat Agenda and Agenda 21,

with an eye to the forthcoming World Summit for Sustainable Development to be held at Johannesburg.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Erna Witolear, Minister of Settlement and Regional Infrastructure of Indonesia.

Mrs. Witolear (Indonesia): Let me first extend my sincere congratulations to you, Sir, on your election as the President of the General Assembly at its twenty-fifth special session on the review of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. It is my delegation's fervent belief that, under your presidency, this session will be brought to a fruitful conclusion.

We are all here today to renew our commitments to the Habitat Agenda we adopted at the Istanbul Conference five years ago. Since then our countries, including Indonesia, have been designing and implementing policies in the field of human settlements and urban management in accordance with that Agenda. Regrettably, in those years, Indonesia has experienced an economic and political crisis, which has severely affected its implementation of the Agenda. This has been further aggravated by natural and human-made disasters, such as floods, earthquakes, drought, forest fires and local communal conflicts. The latter have resulted in the increased existence of internally displaced people, with shelter problems for over a million.

Nevertheless, Indonesia's commitment to the Habitat Agenda remains strong, even though we are still encountering significant constraints in our efforts to implement the Agenda. In this context, therefore, the need for international cooperation has become more urgent than ever.

Despite the severe constraints we have encountered, the Government of Indonesia places high priority not only on increasing the supply of shelters, but also on making them more affordable to lower-income people, while at the same time improving their quality. In this context, the Government has undertaken a number of policies, such as the improvement of housing financing mechanisms and institutions, the establishment of shelter rehabilitation programmes, the improvement of public infrastructure and the promotion of civil society's participation in shelter provision and infrastructure management.

In addition, the Government has also developed policies for ensuring equal access to land, credit facilities, adequate housing and access to basic services. I should also note here that the "shelter for all" strategy, which we seriously adhere to, has been officially included in Indonesia's sixth five-year development plan.

The issue of poverty eradication has long been held as one of Indonesia's top priorities. In pursuit of this objective, the Government has undertaken various action-oriented measures, including, among other things, the creation of employment opportunities. This includes efforts by our Ministry, such as the Urban Poverty Programme, the Rural Infrastructure Development Programme and the Community-Based Housing Initiative. These programmes allocate government funds directly to local communities to initiate activities, all of which directly or indirectly stimulate the local economy, expand employment opportunities and help promote sustainable economic activities at the local level.

An important milestone worth mentioning in the area of social development is the enactment of Presidential Decree No. 9, 2000. This Decree was designed to ensure that women and men have equal access to and control over development resources and equitable participation in decision-making processes and that they benefit equally from the results of development. To implement this Presidential Decree, government planners and decision-makers are urged to develop gender-responsive planning, policies, programmes and activities to achieve gender equity and equality. In this connection, we believe that the greater and equal participation of men and women in development activities, community empowerment and the promotion of public and private partnerships would help to ensure the achievement of the objectives of the "shelter for all" strategy.

Over the past four years, Indonesia has pressed forward with its reform process, during which time the Government has encouraged the acceleration and enhancement of democratization, the decentralization of decision-making and the strengthening of local authorities and public participation. These initiatives and their momentum have catalysed regional economic development and strengthened the Government's commitment to implementing good governance.

In this regard, two laws on local autonomy and central-local revenue-sharing were enacted in 1999 and are now in force. Those laws also affirm the principle

of civil society's broad-based participation in the decision-making and implementation processes. As a consequence, greater transparency and accountability of the Government are greatly required and effective development should be carried out at all levels.

Let me now underline one of the major problems confronted by Indonesia during the past few years: the enormous toll exacted on the population by excessive natural disasters and communal conflicts. As a result, the number of people uprooted and displaced from their homes in Indonesia has grown to over a million. This reflects the serious and severe problems to be overcome by the Government, particularly in ensuring access to adequate shelter for all.

To address the enormity of the problem, we have learned through experience the serious need for an integrated and holistic approach. In this connection, the Indonesian Government and civil society have taken several steps, including, among others, emergency rescue, which includes the provision of temporary shelter, water supply and appropriate sanitation, as well as undertaking reconciliation efforts, reconstruction work and the facilitation of economic recovery. Nevertheless, given the complexity and enormity of the problems being faced, we welcome international support and cooperation in the effort to develop appropriate solutions.

In conclusion, allow me to emphasize once again our strong commitment to enhancing the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. International cooperation and support in this regard play a significant role in contributing towards the implementation of national and global plans of action and in the attainment of the Agenda goals. My delegation sincerely hopes that this meeting will reinvigorate our commitments so as to ensure a down-to-earth approach in the implementation of the Agenda.

Finally, allow me to take this opportunity to express our sincere gratitude and appreciation to the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) secretariat and the international community for their valuable support and assistance to our country in implementing the Habitat Agenda.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency The Honourable Dato' Seri Ong Ka Ting, Minister of Housing and Local Government of Malaysia.

Dato' Seri Ong Ka Ting (Malaysia): Allow me to quote Secretary-General Kofi Annan in his foreword to *Cities in a Globalizing World: Global Report on Human Settlements 2001*.

> "The world has entered the urban millennium. Nearly half of the world's people are now city dwellers, and the rapid increase in urban population is expected to continue, mainly in developing countries. This historic transition is being further propelled by the powerful forces of globalization. The central challenge for the international community is clear: to make both urbanization and globalization work for all people, instead of leaving billions behind or on the margins."

Considering the trends that are reshaping the world's urban structures, and the situation portrayed by the report, my delegation fully subscribes to the message sent by the Secretary-General. With globalization and the greater flow of information, people's expectations have been heightened. This poses greater challenges for Governments, particularly in developing countries. Housing conditions that were adequate before are no longer acceptable. In the light of that situation, this special session is most timely. Clearly, we cannot deny the intrinsic linkage between globalization and urban development that provides comfortable living conditions for city dwellers, whether in the developed world or in developing countries. The questions are, how do we manage the forces of globalization and its impact on urbanization, and how do we ensure that city dwellers worldwide will have equitable benefits?

In Malaysia, we have taken proactive measures by introducing our urbanization master plan and national housing policy, more comprehensive national town and country planning policies and several relevant action plans in our country's development plans. In support of the goals to provide the necessary physical and social infrastructure for the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, Malaysia has introduced its own programmes to provide shelter for all. Those programmes include the zero-squatter policy and the integrated people's housing programme for squatter resettlement, whereby a total of 51,800 units of low-cost flats are to be built in large cities by the year 2005. Those three-bedroom housing units are to be rented out at a very low monthly rate.

Soft housing loans are offered to provide affordable housing for the poor in Malaysia. To encourage home ownership for low-income groups, the Government is increasing its role to build more houses for sale at a subsidized price in order to supplement private sector efforts. The private sector will play a major role in providing low-to-medium cost houses at affordable prices.

We do not discriminate against any group in our efforts to provide shelter for all; even legal migrant workers are provided comfortable shelter by their employers. Other disadvantaged groups, such as female-headed households and poor families, are given priority in Government-aided schemes. Especially designed units to cater to the disabled are also made available.

In reinforcing our policy on public-private partnerships, Malaysia promotes corporate involvement in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. The corporate sector in Malaysia has been actively involved in such programmes and initiatives as the recycling programme, the pilot project on local Agenda 21 and the Business Council for Sustainable Development. The corporate sector is also involved in public education in local communities, schools and nature education centres to increase awareness of environmental issues.

We have achieved a measure of success in our efforts to provide shelter for all and a sustainable urban environment. This was made possible by the joint efforts of all concerned — the federal and state governments, local authorities, financing institutions, the private sector and the target groups themselves. We believe that this formula of joint responsibility can work at the international level as well.

In that regard, we must make a firm and clear commitment to build the needed physical and social infrastructure in developing countries, particularly in the least developed among them. In the context of the Habitat Agenda, the provision of infrastructure such as housing and social facilities will promote social well-being for all and ensure equitable and sustainable urban development.

Given the fact that the cost of building infrastructure is very high and many developing countries, including the least developed among them, cannot possibly build all the infrastructure by themselves, new reliable sources of funds must be found. In that regard, Malaysia would like to reiterate the importance of establishing a fund for infrastructure development in developing countries that includes housing. Malaysia also welcomes the initiative to establish a world solidarity fund for poverty eradication, as proposed in General Assembly resolution 55/210. However, poverty reduction cannot be tackled in a piecemeal or disjointed fashion. It has to be done through an integrated strategy and, in that regard, Malaysia strongly believes that infrastructure development has to be at the core of that strategy.

The developed countries will have to take the lead in providing adequate funds to finance and realize the social policies and programmes of the Habitat Agenda. Developing countries, for their part, will ensure that the programmes are implemented to achieve the objectives of the Habitat Agenda.

Malaysia reaffirms our commitment, and shall endeavour to further enhance our efforts, towards achieving the objectives of the Habitat Agenda. We are prepared to cooperate with member countries in the sharing of experiences and expertise.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Sverre Bugge, State Secretary, Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development of Norway.

Mr. Bugge (Norway): In the Istanbul Declaration we agreed that the deterioration of conditions in human settlements had reached crisis proportions. We committed ourselves to the full and progressive realization of the right to housing; and yet, in many cases the situation has worsened since Istanbul. An increasing number of human beings lack access to decent housing and security of tenure. We must improve the living conditions of those living in poverty and those who, for economic, legal or social reasons, do not have access to decent housing or basic services. The situation with respect to the needs and rights of women is especially serious.

Our task at this session is to reaffirm the commitments we made at the Habitat II Conference and to propose measures for further implementation of the Habitat Agenda. The need now is, first and foremost, for political will and concrete action to improve the living conditions of the poor and homeless. We need to eliminate obstacles, and that means eliminating poverty. At the recent Conference on the Least Developed Countries, in Brussels, our

Minister for International Development, Anne Kristin Sydnes, stated that our obligation to fight poverty is paramount, and yet the international community is not complying with it. Thus our first priority must be to intensify the fight to combat poverty. We need action, and we need it now.

The accelerating process of urbanization, especially in the developing countries, is a major challenge as we enter the new millennium. This was clearly spelled out in the Millennium Declaration. The Cities without Slums action plan was a call for action that was strongly supported by Secretary-General Kofi Annan in his report to the Millennium Assembly, and one that was endorsed by Governments at the highest level.

The work on urbanization issues under the Cities Alliance initiative is a promising example of such new partnerships emerging in the United Nations system as the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (GAVI). The Cities Alliance has our full support. It provides an overall framework for our joint efforts in that regard.

The international community must support the efforts of developing countries to implement the Habitat Agenda. As stated in Brussels, Norway will continue to live up to its official development assistance commitments and is aiming to reach 1 per cent of gross national product. Norway will also maintain its share of support to least developed countries above the target set by the Paris Conference.

But we would like to emphasize that there are also other factors that are essential for achieving sustainable development. As stated in the Millennium Declaration, human rights, democracy and good governance — both domestic and global — are crucial.

In Istanbul we also committed ourselves to developing societies that make efficient use of resources without taxing the carrying capacity of ecosystems. In the most industrialized countries there is an increasing awareness of the importance of environmental protection. There are many examples of good practice and environmentally sound conduct. On the other hand, economic growth and increasing prosperity are leading to increased production and consumption. The result is increased use of resources and impacts on nature that more than outweigh the benefits of environmentally friendly practices. If we are to reverse these trends, we must change our consumption and production patterns.

Human settlements — the built environment — have a serious impact on the natural environment. The development of sustainable human settlements is a key to the sustainable development of any society. For this reason, we need to ensure that the human settlements dimension is given its rightful place in the preparations for the World Summit on Sustainable Development, to be held in Johannesburg, South Africa, next year, and we must also ensure that the outcome of the Summit reflects this.

The United Nations Centre for Human Settlements in Nairobi is a focal point and a prime vehicle for follow-up of the Habitat Agenda. In order to be able to fulfil this role, the Centre's role and place in the United Nations system should be strengthened. The Executive Director, Mrs. Anna Tibaijuka, has our full support in her efforts in this regard.

The declaration to be adopted at this special session must contain three elements: it must describe the present situation in the human settlement field, it must define the challenges that lie ahead and it must provide direction for our future collaborative efforts. It should also present a sharp political message to the world by highlighting our key messages.

This special session is an opportunity to inspire governments at all levels, civil society and all other Habitat partners to reconfirm the commitments made in Istanbul and to work even harder for the successful implementation of the Habitat Agenda. We must seize this opportunity. The poor, the homeless, the natural environment — they deserve our full commitment. Let us do what we can to promote the culture of solidarity.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Božo Kovacevic, Minister of Environment and Physical Planning of Croatia.

Mr. Kovacevic (Croatia): It is a pleasure and a privilege to address this special session of the General Assembly dedicated to the overall review and appraisal of progress made over the last five years since Istanbul. Indeed, this special session comes at an appropriate time to carefully reflect on the current situation and, further, to mobilize commitments to overcome existing obstacles to the implementation of the Habitat Agenda.

The Republic of Croatia welcomes the adoption of the Millennium Declaration and its values and

principles, which strive towards sustainable development, as well as towards the eradication of poverty and the provision of appropriate shelter for all people.

The general international trend, coupled with specific features existing in Croatia, has resulted in the fact that two thirds of Croatia's population lives in urban areas. Consequently, construction demands to meet these needs are particularly pronounced in large cities along the Adriatic coast. At the same time, our islands, mountainous regions and rural areas are fundamentally threatened by depopulation. By way of response, Croatia has been undertaking a number of activities in order to overcome its inherent problems as a country in transition and to provide impetus for further economic growth. The Croatian Government currently faces an immediate demand for reconstruction of war-torn areas devastated during the armed conflict, to be supported by the creation of viable conditions for their sustainable development.

One of the top priorities under Croatia's spatial planning policy is the provision of equal opportunities for a healthy and safe life through the construction of sustainable human settlements within the existing infrastructures. This policy has been devised through basic strategic development documents, such as the Spatial Planning Strategy and Programme of the Republic of Croatia, which includes the integral issue of sustainable development and management of settlements, as well as through spatial plans at the county, municipality and city levels.

Pursuant to current legislation, local self-government units are entrusted with the management and protection of space, under which a legal and institutional framework has been established, providing local authorities and the local population with preconditions for a high degree of independence and responsibility for the space in which they live.

In order to promote gender equality in the development of human settlements, the Government of the Republic of Croatia has established a Commission for Gender Equality Issues, in charge of promoting and monitoring all issues associated with gender equality. In elaborating a new national policy for the period 2001 to 2005, this Commission decided to include, as a separate issue, a chapter focusing on women and the environment.

With the aim of facilitating the resolution of housing procurement issues for its citizens, as well as advancing housing construction, a welfare-supported housing construction programme is being implemented in Croatia. This programme was created in order to elaborate a new organized housing construction system independent of already existing governmental incentive measures. This programme is open to those families that are financially unable to purchase apartments under current market conditions. The draft law on welfare-supported housing construction seeks to resolve housing procurement issues for socially vulnerable members of society, as well as those having medium and low incomes.

The Government of the Republic of Croatia has adopted the national report for Habitat, which has been prepared in accordance with the guidelines of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements. By elaborating the national report, Croatia has met its commitments and is in a position now to assess its implementation of the Habitat Agenda and Istanbul Declaration. The Government expects that the report will speed up implementation of the Habitat Agenda at the local level and will include increased participation by non-governmental organizations in the process.

The Habitat Agenda will form the basis for consideration of the settlement development strategy, as well as for elaborating the housing policy proposal, as one of the elements of the development strategy of the Republic of Croatia in the twenty-first century. The realization of these planning measures will largely depend on the degree of success of economic revitalization, coupled with the related and indispensable increase in the living standards of Croatian citizens.

Croatia will process statistical data in accordance with the Habitat methodology, while for the purpose of promoting the Habitat Agenda's implementation at the local level, the preparation of a pilot project for data monitoring under Habitat methodology has been agreed. The experiences to be gained will provide a strong impetus for all future activities. War-related occurrences in Croatia have caused significant changes in the demographic picture and in the number of inhabitants in several counties, cities and settlements. In comparison with an earlier census undertaken in 1991, the recent census undertaken in March this year shows a decrease of 2.9 per cent in the total number of inhabitants. Once the final results are published, further

monitoring of the situation will be necessary in order to properly evaluate future progress towards achieving quality housing and implementing development policies for sustainable human settlements.

We firmly believe that this special session will act as a catalyst for future initiatives and actions to overcome obstacles that have been identified as hindering the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. International cooperation has played, and will continue to play, an important role in this regard. We therefore welcome the setting up of the Thematic Committee, which provides an important forum for the practical exchange and dissemination of ideas, knowledge and best practices in various fields of human settlements. A very interesting exhibition has also been set up, as part and parcel of this special session, in which many countries, including my own, are presenting various projects illustrating both achievements and challenges in the day-to-day implementation of the Habitat Agenda. The partnership between Governments, local authorities, non-governmental organizations and other groups in civil society play a vital role in this process as a whole.

We expect the draft declaration on cities and other human settlements in the twenty-first century, which is to be adopted at the end of the special session, to provide both an impetus and a new blueprint to steer us towards the full realization of the objectives of the Habitat Agenda in the new millennium.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Jerzy Kropiwnicki, Minister of Regional Development and Construction of Poland.

Mr. Kropiwnicki (Poland): I would like, on behalf of the Polish delegation, to express our satisfaction at seeing you, Sir, presiding over the General Assembly at this special session, and to congratulate you on the excellent manner in which you have been leading the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth session. I would also like to express my respect and appreciation to the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

The sustainable development of human settlements has a positive impact on the living conditions of societies, especially the family. The improvement of living conditions is reflected in the growth of the sense of security. It contributes to the eradication of poverty and homelessness and creates conditions for the development of the individual, the family and society. Today, we are participating in a session to undertake an overall review of the implementation of activities adopted in Istanbul in 1996 and to appraise the effectiveness of our efforts, undertaken for the sustainable development of human habitation, which should unite economic and social development and environmental protection while fully respecting human dignity and rights.

Guided by the recommendations of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), adopted five years ago, the Republic of Poland promotes and applies the principles of sustainable development. The principles have been included in the constitution of the Republic of Poland, whose provisions obligate the public authorities to work for the good of the family in State social and economic policy, and to pursue a policy that ensures ecological security for present and future generations. Further provisions obligate the State to maintain a policy aimed at satisfying housing needs, counteracting homelessness, developing social housing and supporting citizens' activities directed at obtaining their own dwellings. The provisions of the constitution are given priority in documents specifying long-term prospects and plans, for example in Poland's Sustainable Development Strategy to 2025, the National Pro-family Policy Programme, the Space Planning, Real Estate and Housing Construction Strategy and the newly developed National Development Plan.

In its concern for the proper development of the family, the Government of the Republic of Poland has been implementing a National Pro-family Policy Programme, which lists the main targets to be achieved in the coming years. These include the improvement of housing conditions for the population, the limitation of existing negative trends in the population development of the country and the improvement of the demographic situation. The family is the main object and the main subject of the housing policies. In implementing the pro-family policy, the Government is aiming to create all the conditions required for the integration of the family, the preservation of its unity and its protection, in accordance with the principles of sustainable development. Because the family is the natural community of the human being, it has the right to full protection and support. We also give special weight to the recognition of the constructive role of the family in planning and managing human settlements,

promoting peace-building, following the principles of sustainable development and counteracting poverty. The Republic of Poland has adopted as priorities the following measures: further legislative work aimed at securing shelter for the maximum number of families; an active policy involving public authorities in the eradication of poverty, the reduction of unemployment and combating crime; activities related to the implementation of the principles of sustainable development; support for the development of civil society and for the ongoing development of the quality of international and supranational cooperation.

In fulfilling its obligations under the Habitat Agenda, my Government has presented a national report on the implementation of the Agenda in Poland.

As the head of the delegation of the Republic of Poland, I appreciate the significance of the declaration on cities and other human settlements in the new millennium. The Polish delegation approves of the draft and considers it to be a document whose provisions can be translated into concrete activities aimed at the improvement of the quality of life in human settlements. The paragraphs of the draft declaration relating to the support, consolidation and protection of the family as the basic unit of society, as well as to the significance of the family in the planning, development and management of human settlements, deserve the special attention of my country. Poland also appreciates the significance of decentralizing decision-making processes and achieving greater transparency in decision-making by public authorities, and fully supports the paragraphs referring to the role of sustainable development.

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Soumaila Cisse, Minister of Physical Infrastructure, National and Regional Development, Environment and Town Planning of Mali.

Mr. Cisse (Mali) (*spoke in French*): Allow me first of all to say how proud I am to take the floor at such an important meeting. I vigorously salute the initiative of, and congratulate, the United Nations system, particularly Secretary-General Kofi Annan, whose personal initiative played a decisive role in the holding of this summit. Mali attaches real importance to such forums and is keenly interested in the problems of human settlements.

The sectoral policy of Mali in the field of urban development provides a basic framework for the programmes and projects in this area. This policy is aimed at strengthening the coordination of action among all the potential partners — namely, the State, decentralized authorities, private individuals and development partners.

The history of our country, Mali, has taught us that before the contacts of the colonial era, the network of human settlements was rich and varied. Whether it was a question of hamlets, nomads' camps, villages or urban areas, this network was characterized by its special trading system. Evidence of this legacy can still be seen today.

Indeed, the prosperity of the successive empires and kingdoms that have ruled over the national territory was fundamentally supported by a network of urban centres, including those of Timbuktu, Gao, Djenné, Ségou, Sikasso and many others, each of which played a significant role. History is replete with the admiration of travellers, missionaries, colonists and other explorers for the administrative organization of these city-states.

However, it is these centres' architecture that amazed Arab and European visitors, in particular the two gems of Djenné, with its celebrated clay, and Timbuktu, with its limestone facades. This "*Soudanienne*" architecture is noted for its delicacy and style, which was developed as a result of the substantive trade and the intensive intermingling among these various empires and the external world — in particular the Arab-Islamic world. The influence of oriental styles can be seen. The uniqueness of this architecture is revealed in its prestigious classification by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization as part of the common heritage of humankind.

Our country is experiencing enormous problems which are related in particular to the increasing urbanization that is resulting from rapid population growth to a marked exodus from rural areas, exacerbated by the absence of medium-sized cities, and to a lack of adequate resources. Despite the noble objectives pursued under a policy of decentralized urban development, the impact on urbanization as a whole has been very weak.

The general objective of sectoral urban-development policy is to create appropriate conditions for improving the quality of life by strengthening in

particular the fight against poverty, within the framework of decentralization activities.

Without a doubt, the ongoing decentralization process in Mali provides the best opportunity to achieve a true democracy — a basic condition for better meeting the needs of the people. This process promotes their involvement and engagement in the management of their own affairs. This is carried out by means of their freely elected grass-roots representatives.

The national anti-poverty strategy of Mali defines the lack of housing and basic social services as one of the principal spheres for action, especially in the urban environment. Thus quite appropriately the national housing strategy emphasizes the problems of human settlements, recognizing the strong synergy and sustainable harmony between housing and the physical, socio-cultural and economic environments.

Implementation of the sectoral urban-development policy and of the national housing strategy has required the enactment of significant measures, in particular on the institutional level. This coherence promotes professionalism in the sector through greater mobilization of financial resources and the requisite simplification of most of the procedures.

The problem of human settlements is not an isolated issue. Addressing this problem involves taking into account related phenomena, such as health, hygiene, security and even immigration. In other words, the subject is complex and involves numerous actors. If it is to be effective, the response to the problems under consideration must take into account the socio-cultural environment.

Allow me in this regard to paraphrase a thinker who, in speaking about culture, said that a modern environment is comfortable, an outmoded environment is strange. This puts the finger on the problem. It is not a question of a uniform issue, but rather of one that is coloured by the cultural prism of each community. Thus there is no apparent link between the nomad's tent, the Eskimo's igloo, the stilt-houses of people who live on the water and the skyscrapers of the megalopolis. Each of these forms of housing reflects the culture of its occupants and their relationships to the universe. The culture of the slums is thus an interesting subject for anthropologists, psychologists and sociologists.

This is also one of the fields in which international cooperation can play a particularly significant role. While good governance and stability remain objective criteria for support for the activities of developing countries, the urgency of the current issues and their repercussions on related fields demand further attention. In effect it is necessary to take into greater consideration the social nature of these pressing problems, which over the long term may jeopardize the fragile balance that has been achieved at such great cost.

My country currently holds the presidency of the Economic Community of West African States and of the Economic and Monetary Union of West Africa. Mali's work, under the leadership of President Alpha Oumar Konaré, aims at pooling the national experiences in the subregion to improve integration not only in the economic sphere, but also as regards security, immigration, environmental protection and human settlements.

The challenge is immense. The burden is weighty, especially for the developing countries. The international community can seek solutions to settlement problems in the global development framework through specific actions to combat poverty. It is not a question of ready-made solutions, but of joint initiatives, governed by new criteria based on solidarity and partnership. This is an original approach — not obvious to everybody, yet promising. We all face these environmental, health, security and immigration issues, because this is a global village. A problem in one part of the world inevitably affects humankind as a whole. In this case as elsewhere, no one can be saved by himself, without the others. If there is to be a solution, it must be a global one.

The President: Now I give the floor to His Excellency the Honourable Shri Jagmohan, Minister for Urban Development and Poverty Alleviation of India.

Mr. Jagmohan (India): Let me, at the outset, convey the warm greetings of the Government and people of India to all members of the United Nations family. India and her 1 billion people are firmly committed to the United Nations Charter and the Habitat Agenda. I will only touch upon the larger issues, as my detailed statement is being circulated.

From the very birth of our Republic, India has recognized that the problem of shelter is the problem of

the epoch. "If human welfare is our objective", said India's first Prime Minister, Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru, "it is bound up with the house".

India also believes that the world of the twenty-first century will be an urban world, and our well-being will depend upon the manner in which the problems of urban politics, urban poverty, urban pollution, urban productivity, urban shortages, urban planning and urban governance are tackled.

From time to time, the Government of India has been taking various measures for providing shelter to all. In 1998, a comprehensive Housing and Habitat Policy was adopted, keeping in view the provisions of the Habitat II Agenda.

India is happy that the United Nations Commission on Human Settlements launched its Global Campaign for Secure Tenure in Bombay. In this context, I commend for the Assembly's attention the Narela Rehabilitation Programme in Delhi. India also looks forward to the launch of the Global Campaign on Urban Governance in September 2001 in New Delhi.

The seventy-third and seventy-fourth amendments to our Constitution, pertaining to democratic decentralization, have already attracted international attention. The gains of these amendments have been consolidated. Thirty-three per cent of all local body seats, in both rural and urban areas, are now reserved for women representatives. One third of the mayors and chairpersons of elected local bodies in India are now women.

The many international initiatives taken so far reflect our concern for the manifold problems facing human settlements, as well as our commitment to resolve them. Should we merely confine ourselves to showing concern, declaring our commitment and taking a few measures here and there? Should we not go a little deeper and look into the factors and forces which are of fundamental importance and have a far-reaching impact on our fate and future?

Today, as we meet 29 years after Stockholm, 25 years after Vancouver, nearly a decade after Rio and five years after Istanbul, should we not ask ourselves to what extent the ground-level reality has changed for most of the people living in developing countries? Is it not true that many more are without shelter now, inhabiting stinking slums, drinking polluted water, inhaling poisonous air, unemployed or underemployed and exposed to new scourges like AIDS? Should we not look into the deeper implications of the fact that during all these years, while we have been adopting resolutions and observing "days" and "decades", there has emerged, on one side, a small group of nations that are prosperous, technologically advanced, less populous but excessively consumerist; and on the other, there remains another, much larger group of nations that are poor, technologically weak and populous, with many people living in subhuman conditions. Clearly, the overall scene is marked by deeper disparities than before. Global fairness is an essential prerequisite to the removal of debilitating environments. Donor countries, as early as 1970, committed 0.7 per cent of their gross national product to their less fortunate brethren and are still struggling to fulfil even one third of this commitment.

India attaches much importance to a comprehensive review of the commitments made at Istanbul. Clearly, considerable progress has been achieved, but a plethora of gaps and obstacles are evident. The need now is to renew these commitments and reinforce them through practical measures for actual implementation. To achieve this, we would like to see the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) further strengthened as the principal instrument of international cooperation on all Habitat-related matters.

Let us learn from the past; let us be more realistic about the present; and let us show greater practical wisdom and deeper humanitarian concern in planning and providing for the future. What Bertrand Russell said years ago is pertinent even today:

> "We are in the middle of a race between human skill as to means and human folly as to ends. Unless man increases in wisdom as much as in knowledge, increase in knowledge will be increase in sorrow."

It is time that we made new commitments, not only in the form of declarations, but also in the form of arrangements that would make these declarations yield results at the ground level and help in creating healthy, happy and harmonious habitats all over the globe. Today may be timely; tomorrow would be too late.

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Mohamed Ibrahim Soliman, Minister of Housing, Utilities and Urban Communities of Egypt.

Mr. Soliman (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): First of all, I wish to convey to all present our gratitude and congratulations on the holding of this special session of the General Assembly. I would also like to stress its significance, because it concerns very important themes involving peoples' lives. It is a comprehensive review and appraisal of everything that we have done pursuant to the 1996 United Nations Conference on Human Settlements in Istanbul until the present time, a time when globalization is starting to become a reality, to make the whole world a global village.

In this respect, I would like to confirm the Arab Republic of Egypt's commitment to the Habitat Agenda. I also wish to highlight Egypt's efforts since 1996 in implementing the Agenda.

First of all, with respect to housing, the State has consolidated the right to adequate housing for all citizens, and for low-income people in particular. We have created 447,000 housing units at a cost of $4 billion. The governmental sector implements 20 per cent of this plan, while the private sector implements the other 80 per cent. We have two pilot projects for this housing plan: the Mubarak Project for housing young people and the future Mustaqbal Project under the auspices of the first lady of Egypt. The latter is a project which crystallizes solidarity between the rich and poor, and both projects are composed of 140,000 housing units. The Mustaqbal Project received the first prize from the Council of Housing and Construction Ministers for the year 2000.

We have also improved 254 slums, and we are in the process of improving over 418 other areas where squatters have been installed, at a cost of $500 million. We have a project for a strategy to develop these areas in Cairo, the Nasser Project.

Mr. Kafando (Burkina Faso), Vice-President, took the Chair.

With regard to equal opportunities, we have created cities and communities in desert areas that total 350 square kilometres. Also in support of housing, we have provided financial assistance with more than $750 million in easy credit loans. The proportion of families with sanitation services has increased by 82.6 per cent; 95.1 per cent have electricity, and we are in the process of restructuring the water and sanitation sectors for better performance.

Secondly, we are currently organizing legislation to cover construction and urbanization with respect to social development and the reduction of poverty. The Government, the private sector and non-governmental organizations have all adopted the national project to combat poverty. We have improved social security pensions and have increased the social development fund and rural development activities.

We have held a national conference on social development, and a national conference on women chaired by the wife of the head of State, in order to crystallize equality between the sexes. In Egypt, women have acceded to a number of high posts. The mortality rate in children under five years of age has declined, as has crime, unemployment and illiteracy.

Thirdly, with respect to environmental management, we are working to reduce urban pollution by introducing the environmental dimension into development policies. We are adopting measures to avoid disasters and to cope with their aftermath and to improve traffic and its safety and to limit emissions from transportation.

Fourthly, support for human settlements rose by 3.9 per cent last year. The budgetary deficit is 3.4 per cent and the rate of inflation has declined to 2.7 per cent, while the job opportunities rate is 73 per cent with the participation of the private sector.

Fifthly, with respect to local administration, we have created local centres on urban planning in six out of seven provinces in the State. We have also created economic bodies to develop drinking water and sanitation, as well as professional training centres to support their work. Training programmes in the provinces have increased by 324 centres. Additionally, programmes for raising efficiency and capabilities for local leadership and for women have been developed.

With respect to international cooperation, we would stress the declaration on cities and other human settlements, which is to be endorsed at this session.

It is advantageous for the implementation of the Agenda to allow developing countries to achieve greater development in order to improve human settlements. From the Egyptian standpoint, first of all, we must insure State commitments to increase their financial participation in promoting adequate housing by coordinating international assistance, exchanging information and research and encouraging activities

and common projects among States, organizations and United Nations agencies.

Egypt held an Arab conference on urban management in cooperation with the Arab League, the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) and the Arab Institute for Development in the form of colloquiums organized by Egypt on the subject of human settlements.

We are increasingly concerned in Egypt over Israeli threats and aggressions against the Palestinian people. Israel has targeted urban agglomerations of Palestinians with aircraft and artillery despite the political complications of the current situation in occupied Arab territories. One legal reality concerning the theme of our conference, present in the minds of the international community, is the legitimacy of the transfer by the occupation authority of their citizens to the occupied territories in contradiction of the 1949 Geneva Convention. The Security Council and the General Assembly have reaffirmed that this Convention applies to all Arab and Palestinian territories that Israel has occupied since 1967. We call on the international community to bring every possible pressure to bear on Israel to prompt it to implement the relevant resolutions of the Security Council, especially since Israeli settlements in the Palestinian territories, the seizure of lands and the obstruction of the movement of Palestinians, pose a threat to peace and security. This is the root of all the violence.

Finally, we will pursue action to implement the Habitat Agenda and we reaffirm our commitment to it in terms of its political and legal dimensions. We wish everyone success in carrying out the goals set here.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Marco Aurelio Sánchez, Minister and President of the Bank of Housing of Nicaragua.

Mr. Sánchez (Nicaragua) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, let me express my warmest greetings to you and to all delegates attending this meeting. At the same time, I would like to express my sincere congratulations to the President for his election as the President of the General Assembly at this twenty-fifth special session for an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements. We are certain that with his experience and diplomatic ability, this special session of the General Assembly will reach a successful conclusion.

The housing situation of the Nicaraguan people is extremely difficult, both in quantity and in quality, and is the biggest problem in the rural areas of the country. In order to resolve this problem, the Government under Mr. Arnoldo Alemán Lacayo, President of the Republic of Nicaragua, has declared that it is necessary to establish a nationwide housing policy.

The creation of the Urban and Rural Housing Institute in June 1998 is a reflection of the aforementioned situation. This Institute, as a decentralized State entity, is in charge of national level programmes for urban and rural housing development. Its duties are promoting, facilitating and diversifying housing construction with the participation of the private sector both domestic and foreign.

To date the Urban and Rural Housing Institute has implemented a number of programmes. The housing development subsidies programme offers various forms of assistance. In the urban areas of Managua, subsidies of up to 50 per cent have been granted for down payments on houses that, on account of their characteristics and market value have been declared subjects of social interest. These new urbanization developments have been built by private initiatives.

In addition, the poorest farmers in rural areas have received subsidies to improve their basic housing conditions. For example, the current earthen floors are being replaced by concrete floors and the palm-leaf ceilings by corrugated iron roofs. Such subsidies are granted to beneficiaries through municipal mayoral offices, which are in charge of organizing technical assistance to carry out self-help work.

To support the work of non-governmental organizations that offer solutions to the housing problems, such organizations have been provided with property, materials and technical assistance.

Secondly, the human settlements programmes — with or without an economic component — focus on addressing the housing problems of the poorest sectors of the rural and urban population, who, because of their low incomes, lack access to decent housing. In addition, these programmes provide a solution for members of the farming population displaced by natural disasters such as hurricanes and earthquakes. Our solution has created human settlements that are not

merely planned, but conceived in the context of an integrated vision. This guarantees both the development and the economic productivity of communities in order to raise the quality of live for their populations.

The rebuilding of a neighbourhood in the old urban area of Managua, with the support of the European Union, is almost complete. This urbanization area includes specific places for small businesses. Additionally, we have concluded the first projects in support of eco-tourism development in the Reserva Indio Maiz. Houses have been built whose owners will offer accommodation and meals to tourists. The beneficiaries of such projects are families that currently work at small-scale fishing.

Construction will soon begin on the first self-sustainable rural settlement. This pilot project, partially financed by Spain, is aimed at resettling 250 Pacific-region farming families who were directly affected by hurricane Mitch in 1998. These families will receive 1,055 hectares of excellent fertile farmland, and each will have their own house and will engage in intensive agriculture using modern technological methods. That human settlement will have communal facilities, such as schools, health centres and churches. The implementation of this project will demand a high level of inter-ministerial coordination. But community involvement will be crucial to ensure the success of the project. Community development of the resettled population will be the key to the successful administration and operation of the project.

All these programmes are designed to be consistent with sustainable development. For this reason, the Urban and Rural Institute submits its project portfolios for prior risk and environmental-impact studies; these are carried out by the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources and by the Nicaraguan Institute of Territorial Studies.

Rich experience has been gained over the past five years, and the Floor and Ceiling Programme has planned some 20,000 housing units per year for the next five years. The Urban and Rural Institute has submitted its draft statute to the presidency of the Republic of Nicaragua with a view to expediting its consideration by the National Assembly. The draft statute includes the establishment of a social fund for housing, which will be allocating all its resources to programmes for those who are the most severely disadvantaged socially and economically.

The Government of Nicaragua reaffirms its commitment to continuing to make all necessary efforts towards full implementation of the goals of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements. Here, my Government calls upon all delegations to continue to work together to achieve a better world, in order to provide future generations with decent housing in a framework of integral and sustainable development.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Leonor Coutinho, Secretary of State for Housing of Portugal.

Mrs. *Coutinho* (Portugal): At the outset, I would like to state that Portugal fully supports the statement made by Sweden on behalf of the European Union.

I wish next to reaffirm the commitment of the Portuguese Government to the full implementation of the Habitat Agenda and to its follow-up. Since the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), held at Istanbul in 1996, we have met and overcome many challenges. But new questions have arisen which require innovative approaches if we are to fulfil the two main commitments of the Habitat Agenda: adequate shelter for all and sustainable urban development.

Portugal is among the European Union countries where urbanization is on the rise, with the population becoming concentrated in the outskirts of the large and medium-sized cities, resulting in the physical and environmental degradation of the old city centres.

As to the Portuguese experience in attaining adequate shelter for all, I would like to mention one of our major achievements: our national re-housing programmes which include multidimensional approaches and the creation of public spaces that promote a sense of community and respect for everything related to quality of life. Also worth mentioning are our urban rehabilitation programmes, which have been formulated to take into account the fact that these goals can be successfully achieved only through integrated intervention in the architectural, urban, social, economical and environmental spheres. Distressed urban areas too have been among our main concerns. Here, measures have been taken to integrate such areas into the urban setting through improvement of the physical environment, the renovation of housing

stock, building-conservation and providing access to services. In addition to those integrated programmes, a variety of financial and fiscal measures have been implemented to promote affordable housing for different income groups.

On the second goal of the Habitat Agenda, sustainable urban development, which has become a national priority, the Portuguese Government, two years after the Istanbul Conference, enacted the Spatial and Urban Planning Act. That comprehensive and integrated urban policy is aimed at achieving a balanced and polycentric urban network by taking account of the special needs of rural areas, the rehabilitation and regeneration of suburbs, the revitalization of old city centres, the adequate provision of services and infrastructure, attention to the urban environment and a sustainable urban policy that takes into account the conservation and management of national resources and ecosystems. Those goals have been implemented through various programmes and measures, many of them put into practice through public-private partnerships. In all these processes, public participation and involvement are guaranteed by law.

All the programmes that I have mentioned include a social dimension aimed at fighting poverty and at promoting social inclusion.

I would like in conclusion to point out that my Government is promoting the decentralization process and the strengthening of local authorities, which are considered to be the most appropriate entities to implement the Habitat Agenda.

We look forward to a successful outcome of this special session; I can assure the Assembly that the Portuguese Government is fully committed to continuing its work to achieve sustainable human settlements.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Raul Flórez García Rada, Vice-Minister of State of Housing and Construction of Peru.

Mr. Flórez García Rada (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): The people and the new Transition Government of Peru offer their greetings to the national representatives here and look forward to the conclusion of the preparatory process overseen by Ambassador García Durán of Colombia, which will permit the adoption of conclusions and of the declaration that the General Assembly will have before it at this special session.

Only six months ago, the new Transition Government took a series of decisions on the democratic reinstitutionalization of our country, aimed at creating conditions to overcome a decade of political crisis marked by centralism and structural corruption. Peru is characterized by its biodiversity, heterogeneity and great potential in natural, historic and human resources. Its vast territory, the third in size in South America, is very rugged, with highly fragile ecosystems subject to cyclic phenomena. The Inca culture dealt in an admirable way with this territory in such settlements as Machu Pichu. Three fourths of Peru's current population of 26 million people live in cities and Lima holds a third of that population — some 8 million people. Unfortunately, however, half of the population is poor and 15 per cent are extremely poor. Nevertheless, this population has built dwellings, which, although they have been constructed informally, offer notable examples of social solidarity for the international community with regard to local initiatives.

During the past decade, the State addressed the housing problem through isolated but quite effective institutions. The coverage of public services was substantially expanded and 75 per cent of the total population now has access to drinking water, sewage and electricity. Moreover, 1.5 million land ownership titles — 75 per cent of them informal lots — were also granted, without regard to the gender of the owner. Peru has pursued this interesting initiative over a number of years. In addition, approximately half a million loans, worth some $600 million, were granted to build private dwellings.

However, when the integrated, explicit and coordinated policies were eliminated, the housing sector was unfortunately destroyed and urban development and land management were seriously affected. Local governments were severely weakened by the decrease in their economic resources and powers. Moreover, the access of civil society to the decision-making process was restricted and grass-roots organizations were politically manipulated. In sum, the housing problem worsened for the low-income sectors, demonstrating that this route was not feasible in the long term.

Over the past six months, our Transition Government has launched five major initiatives. The first is rebuilding the institutionality of the public housing and urban development sector, inter alia, by creating committees to coordinate the struggle against poverty so that social investment can be decided at the municipal level. Secondly, local governments are being strengthened, inter alia, by having their power restored to issue property titles, manage public transportation, take initiative for housing programmes and promote Agenda 21. Thirdly, conditions are being created to attract resources from the private sector and international cooperation. Fourthly, we are working with grass-roots organizations of civil society in designing housing and urban development policies, programmes and projects. Finally, our Government is proposing models of land management and strategies of urban consolidation to develop pre-prepared areas of the cities through job creation, such as the participatory management programme known as "Mibarrio".

By promoting the broadest participation of the various public and private bodies in the implementation of the national action programme, these policy measures are in accordance with the basic principles of Habitat II. We welcome the report of the Executive Director of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat), which we receive with satisfaction.

We therefore believe that the habitat problems in Peru can be resolved on the basis of a facilitating initiative of the State promoting civic commitment, solidarity, participation, training, devotion to public service and the mobilization and efficient management of available resources.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to Ms. Amina Abdi Aden, representative of Djibouti.

Ms. Abdi Aden (Djibouti) (*spoke in French*): I am very honoured to take the floor before this Assembly on behalf of my country, the Republic of Djibouti.

In recent years, the motive role of cities in the development process has been recognized in terms of both the national and global economies, despite the major obstacles that persist. It has also been possible to gauge their growing dependence on a globalized economic environment, the complexity of the remaining challenges and the considerable importance to our countries of the sustainable development of human settlements.

For some years now, the same concerns have driven the thinking and activities of the Government of Djibouti. This action has led to the identification of national priority objectives aimed primarily at the development of Djibouti as an international maritime city, the establishment of the necessary infrastructure for its operation, the correction of economic and social balances between various sectors of activity and regions of the country, and action to combat poverty in urban and pastoral sectors. This special session of the General Assembly devoted to the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, adopted in Istanbul in 1996, gives our countries an opportunity to take stock of progress achieved, assess the impact of our efforts, draw lessons therefrom and formulate new recommendations for action.

In the Republic of Djibouti, where over 80 per cent of the population lives in cities, the economy is based primarily on the activities of services that are concentrated in the capital, Djibouti. Given that the concept of the city-State has often been associated with our country, the urban factor is of particular importance in our case.

Conscious of the stakes involved in implementing the Habitat Agenda and of the strategic importance of sustainable development, and despite its current budgetary crisis, the Republic of Djibouti has endeavoured to incorporate the Istanbul commitments into all of its activities. In this connection, following the holding of the Habitat II Conference, most of the actions called for with regard to human settlements have been included in Djibouti's national action plan. However, we must recognize that despite the difficulties encountered in mobilizing financial resources at the national and international levels, the implementation of those commitments has fallen short of the desired results.

For the last five years, our country has primarily concentrated on applying the Habitat Agenda in the mobilization and coordination of actors in the development and management of human settlements; the involvement of local authorities in the preparation of a legislative mechanism for carrying out progressive decentralization; the implementation of operational urban tools on the local and national levels; and the

identification and mobilization of the necessary financial resources.

With regard to urban planning, a review of the master plans of the country's main cities has been underway since 1997. Approved in 1999, these new instruments go beyond mere space planning and involve a whole set of socio-economic and urban development aspects.

In May 2001, a workshop on habitat and human settlements management was held with a view to renewing the dialogue between managers and users of urban space. Considering the largely interdisciplinary nature of the sector and the general interest in coordinating action in this regard, Djibouti's Head of State, His Excellency Mr. Ismail Omar Guelleh, sought to involve in the workshop users, representatives of civil society and social partners so that they might better contribute to defining government activities in this area.

Within the confines of responsible citizenship, participants were urged to address the functioning and shortcomings of a municipal service that does not yet respond to the collective needs of the nation. Their recommendations included, among other things, the establishment of special funds to finance basic infrastructure and public housing, reformulating regulatory mechanisms, identifying new modes of solidarity among residents and, finally, creating efficient operational tools that address the needs of all.

To achieve the objective of adequate housing for all within the context of projects supported by the Government and its partners, emphasis was placed on providing utilities-equipped lots for low-income groups; building low-cost housing under rent-to-buy arrangements; and establishing emergency subdivisions containing lots with provisional utility services. This last measure responds to the serious need to limit illicit connections to essential urban infrastructure and equipment. All these measures are aimed primarily at increasing recipients' security of tenure and, upon payment of fees to cover the cost of equipment, would allow them to receive permanent titles of tenure.

At a time when major events are taking place in Djibouti — such as the signing of the peace accords on the restoration of national concord and the establishment of a legal framework for decentralization — it is clear that the poverty reduction strategy document currently being prepared must include the issue of habitat among priority actions to be taken.

Respecting the commitments made at Istanbul and implementing the Habitat Agenda are priorities for our country. The stakes are high and, given the growth of our urban population and the finite nature of national resources, we must respond to this reality by promulgating equipment and housing policies that are both mindful of quantitative and qualitative aspects and aimed at optimal and equitable use of available resources. The harmonious and sustainable development of our country depends on it.

I wish the Assembly every success in its work.

Mr. Dangue Réwaka (Gabon), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Mr. Stuart Leslie, Head of the delegation of Belize.

Mr. Leslie (Belize): In Istanbul we committed ourselves to ensuring adequate shelter for all and to exercising diligence in making human settlements safe, healthy, liveable, equitable, productive and sustainable. We are gathered now to evaluate our performance, renew our commitment to these important goals and seek new approaches to creating a better standard of living for our people. While this is an occasion to revisit our achievements since Istanbul, we must also be aware of the mandate issued to us by our heads of State and Government at the Millennium Summit as articulated in the Millennium Declaration, namely

> "We will spare no effort to free our fellow men, women and children from the abject and dehumanizing conditions of extreme poverty, to which more than a billion of them are currently subjected." (*para. 11*)

These ideas should help us to focus our efforts at this special session on adequate shelter for all, sustainable human settlements and development in an urbanizing world.

For some years now, we have been faced with the reality of economic globalization, some of us with great hope and others with equal concern. While there may be as many interpretations of globalization as there are nations represented here today, there is a popular understanding that meaningful, sustainable globalization must include all our people. When the

major protagonists of globalization ignore that message, people suffer and billions are denied access to proper drinking water, adequate health care, basic education and decent shelter and are consequently exposed to debilitating diseases.

Yet, our concern, though legitimate, should not cause us to lose sight of the benefits globalization can bring us. Greater access to improved food supplies, cost-effective low- and medium-income housing and better management of the world ecology can all become positive aspects of globalization. But that can only be realized through a shared partnership. We must therefore work together to make these potential successes serve as the building blocks of a globalization that is just and sustainable, moving those who live in dire poverty to greater sustainable development while placing those of us who live on the margins in a more secure position in the global economy. For if we are to help our poor, we who govern must provide a climate where those with the greatest needs have access to quality education, technology and credit and are made to feel that they are contributors to the nation's economic development.

To better empower our citizens we must be aware of the continuous changes in our societies. Today, large numbers of people are moving away from small towns and villages in search of a better life in urban centres. In Belize we have witnessed over the past 30 years a 62 per cent growth in the urban population. This overcrowding of our cities creates new challenges for already stretched local governments. Ageing and over-stressed infrastructure are becoming increasingly inadequate; urban schools are overcrowded; rising urban crime disrupts once peaceful neighbourhoods and traffic clogs our streets, creating new forms of rage and intolerance. Once quiet neighbourhoods where people felt safe have become noisy places where residents spend valuable resources to protect their children and secure valuable possessions. Where there was once a community spirit, people now practice the old adage of hear no evil, see no evil and speak no evil.

We must work to remedy that situation by improving our infrastructure, better managing our space and adopting programmes to improve the quality of life in our urban and rural communities. Local governments are crucial to this endeavour and require the autonomy to govern their communities. For it is in those communities and neighbourhoods that our families grow and prosper. That is where they participate in the life of the nation, and it is from there that they get the support of our institutions. Their involvement in the life of local communities brings about meaningful participation and provides greater transparency, making government's business accountable to the people.

In a country where more than 30 per cent of the people are poor, most of them women, consideration must be given to poverty alleviation from a multisectoral perspective. Belize recognizes the need to invest in its human resources, utilizing the assets available to us, thereby providing productive capacity to the people, especially the poor. The Prime Minister of Belize, in his statement before the first sitting of Parliament in 1998, committed his Government to providing a higher standard of living for Belizean men and women. He said,

> "The cornerstone of our strategy is our growth economics, which will attract many new investments and create thousands of new jobs with just conditions and wages for workers. This will involve a massive national housing programme, an infrastructure development scheme and new agriculture, tourism and industry projects."

In addition, he called on Belizeans to seriously address the needs of the poor. In fulfilment of this promise, the Government of Belize has undertaken a five-year National Poverty Elimination Strategy and Action Plan, which addresses poverty alleviation, reduction and elimination in the short, medium and long term.

This plan seeks to realize growth with equity in both rural and urban areas. At its core is lower taxation and job creation that enhances society's ability to produce and provide a higher standard of living, promote productivity and provide access to credit and the acquisition and enhancement of skills. The immediate actions taken to achieve these objectives included the elimination of personal income tax for anyone who earns less than $10,000 annually; the creation of small farmers' and business banks, increased funding for the Social Investment Fund, which places an emphasis on funding programmes for women, the introduction of a national health insurance scheme, the enactment of legislation to empower village councils to manage their own affairs without

political interference and a housing scheme aimed at building 10,000 new houses by 2003.

Together with the private sector, the non-governmental organization community and local governments, Belizeans are confident about Belize's economic development, in spite of the setbacks caused by hurricanes Mitch in 1998 and Keith in 2000, which collectively cost Belizeans more than $300 million in damages.

Although these accomplishments are noteworthy, we realize that they are limited. Like the rest of the developing world, Belize recognizes the importance of shared responsibility. It is for this reason that we once again appeal to our developed partners to recognize our vulnerabilities and to help develop our capacities to modernize by sharing technologies and assisting in protecting our environment and managing our resources. The international funding agencies must aid developing countries to prevent future crises and help provide the necessary resources to help us move from the margins of economic development to greater prosperity.

This occasion challenges us to do more. We cannot leave this place without an admission of the urgency of action. The more than 100 million people who are homeless and the many who are starving must be provided the opportunity for a dignified life. It is as much our collective responsibility as it is each of our Government's responsibility to ensure that we do more and that we do more now.

Aware of this urgency and in the spirit of action, Belize reaffirms its commitment to the Habitat Agenda and urges all members of our human family to continue working towards the attainment of a truly just world where all have equal access to adequate shelter, with safe, healthy settlements and the other basic rights to which all aspire.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I call on His Excellency Mr. Georg Lennkh, Director-General for Development Cooperation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Chairman of the delegation of Austria.

Mr. Lennkh (Austria): At the outset, let me stress that Austria fully associates itself with the statement made by the Swedish delegation on behalf of the European Union.

Five years ago we met in Istanbul to discuss the challenges of human settlements and to endorse universal goals to ensure adequate shelter for all and to make human settlements safer and more salubrious, as well as more liveable, equitable, sustainable and productive. Today's review will also have to provide answers to the challenges arising from recent trends in urbanization and human settlements. This leads us to a number of reflections.

Urbanization is here to stay. The figures are unequivocal; we all know them. Also — and we have to write this on our task lists — urbanization should no longer be seen as a negative development that should or could be slowed down or halted by better rural development. On the contrary, urbanization can have beneficial effects on the environment, empowerment of the poor, population development, the advancement of women, sustainable development and, above all, the fight against poverty. Rural and urban zones, we recognize today, have to complement each other.

Poverty eradication is the first objective on the list of international development goals, as most recently embodied in the Millennium Declaration, and cities are formidable engines of growth and of income generation.

"What, then, is the problem?" we might ask. To put it very simply: urbanization brings out in stark fashion the best and the worst of all possible worlds. Nowhere is the divide between rich and poor greater, more striking, with more explosive potential. The effects of globalization which we are able to observe at present — the increasing gap between rich and poor regions and countries and between the rich and poor in these countries — are amplified by the growth of cities. The undeniable benefits of globalization come first to the cities, but they exert even greater pressure on the poor: rising prices, scarcity of land and diminishing public goods. This is where the challenge for our future work lies.

Let me just pick out one example: water, on which Austrian development cooperation has been particularly active. At the beginning of the new millennium, more than 1 billion people still lack access to clean water and 3 billion people live without access to hygienic sanitary installations, while it is one of the key recommendations of the Millennium Declaration, in paragraph 19, "to halve the proportion of people who are unable to reach or afford safe drinking water."

Modern water management works by implementing the precautionary principle on solutions that start at a micro level. Rather than seeking technical solutions that are often based on a "repair approach", long-term sustainable water management at the regional level improves the standard of living of the population and maintains sustainable water supply for future generations.

Another example of Austrian activities in the field of human settlements is the Best Practices Centre for Central and Eastern Europe, which was founded by the city of Vienna in cooperation with the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) in 1999. This Best Practices hub acts as a centre for knowledge, experience and expertise in the region, collecting and disseminating best practices. It also acts as an urban observatory, monitoring the programmes of the city of Vienna and the implementation of best practices programmes.

The real challenge in all these experiences was not, or certainly was not only, technology, but was much more the acceptance of any solution by all people concerned, and in particular by the poor. This is why any simplistic privatization scheme cannot work. This is why real participation, effective partnership and good governance by local authorities is so important. This is where we need time, perhaps the most valuable of all resources.

In Austria the Habitat Agenda and Agenda 21 are implemented by the federal Government, the nine provinces and local authorities, representing a total of more than 2,000 municipalities. Such spreading of responsibilities offers favourable conditions for the independence of local authorities, as well as for bottom-up strategies of popular participation.

Let me conclude by saying that questions of urbanization and habitat have to become an integral part of our development agenda, and that participatory development in its broadest sense has to be integrated into the approach to solving the problems of urbanization. The battle against poverty has to be fought everywhere, in the cities just as in the countryside. But if we do not win it in the cities, it will not be won at all.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. John Hodges, Chairman of the delegation of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Hodges (United Kingdom): The United Kingdom wishes to give its full support to the statement made by Sweden, in its role as chair of the European Union group, regarding the substantive issues of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda.

The United Kingdom is one of the most urbanized countries in the world, and has a long history of dealing with issues related to urbanization. It has extensive experience of developing housing and urban policy, but that policy is in constant need of updating. This special session offers an important opportunity to review, reflect and report upon our experiences of the past five years in the light of our commitment to achieving the goals of the Habitat Agenda, and to look to the future.

We are aware that globalization increases the interdependence of cities and countries, and that efforts have to be made to ensure that the benefits offered by globalization also reach those most in need. What we do in the United Kingdom must be placed within a broader international context. In our report on progress in implementing the Habitat Agenda, the United Kingdom focuses on our commitment to creating inclusive cities, through poverty reduction, respect for human rights and the empowerment of excluded and underprivileged groups. This commitment applies to what we do both at home and abroad. In our report, we have presented a summary of our domestic and international action, side by side, within the Habitat reporting framework.

The United Kingdom believes that achieving the 2015 international development targets as they relate to health, education, gender, the environment and reducing poverty in all areas — particularly urban poverty, which is a growing problem — will provide the preconditions for realizing the Habitat Agenda.

In this regard, the United Kingdom has produced a strategy for meeting the challenge of poverty in urban areas, to guide its international development cooperation efforts and to aid our partners in their efforts at implementing the Habitat Agenda. Copies of the strategy are available from the United Kingdom delegation and are on the Web site of the Department for International Development.

The United Kingdom strategy highlights the important role that is played by the United Nations in general, and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) in particular, in helping to

combat world poverty. At the eighteenth session of the Commission on Human Settlements, in Nairobi last February, we announced an increase in the level of the United Kingdom's voluntary contributions to the Habitat Foundation, believing that the revitalization of the Centre has now provided developing countries with an agency that can assist them in the fight against poverty in all human settlements.

The United Kingdom is also pleased to support the work of the Commonwealth Consultative Group on Human Settlements, which brings us into a working arrangement to focus on implementing the Habitat Agenda in the 50 developing countries of the Commonwealth. Those countries have a stated emphasis on the need for demonstrated progress towards adequate shelter for all, with security of tenure, and access to essential services in every community by 2015. This target complements that set out in the Millennium Declaration, which aims at improving the lives 100 million slum-dwellers within the next 20 years. This brings the responsibility for implementing the Habitat Agenda to the local level. In this regard, we believe that the Cities Alliance, which brings together the combined resources of Habitat, the World Bank, the regional banks, the World Association of Cities and Local Authorities Coordination and 10 of the bilateral donors, is already delivering real results on the ground.

Within the United Kingdom, the Government has recently reviewed its urban policy in an Urban White Paper which aims at achieving an urban renaissance and reversing the decades of decline which have affected many of Britain's towns and cities. Empowering communities, building on and extending good urban governance, achieving access to affordable housing and livelihood opportunities and a secure and high quality of life for all, especially the most excluded, depend on sustainable development at all levels.

In 2002, ministers from government departments throughout the United Kingdom will host an urban summit to explore the implementation of the Urban White Paper. The Habitat Agenda helps to put these domestic efforts in the context of the United Kingdom's international commitments. Next year, we will be gathering in Johannesburg to report on our progress in achieving the aims set out in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. We must not forget the key contribution of the Habitat Agenda in guiding local development to help achieve sustainable development at the global level. We have every confidence that our deliberations here over the next few days will play a significant part in strengthening the mandate of Habitat and thereby make a real contribution to the elimination of world poverty.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Shamshad Ahmad, Chairman of the delegation of Pakistan.

Mr. Ahmad (Pakistan): I should like at the outset to felicitate the President of the General Assembly at this special session convened to undertake an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. We look forward to a positive outcome from this session under his able and dynamic stewardship. We would also like to thank the Executive Director of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements for her report on the implementation of the Habitat Agenda.

Five years ago, when the world came together at Istanbul — a city of civilizational character — for the Habitat Conference, our leaders offered a common positive vision for creating healthy, safe and sustainable human settlements. With an engaging spirit of renewed optimism, we kindled a sense of hope for our common future and joined in an exhortation to meet a truly worthwhile and engaging global challenge.

Today, as we embark upon a five-year review of our own performance, we have, unfortunately, little to celebrate. The malady afflicting human settlements continues unabated. Urban poverty has expanded and millions remain deprived of their basic civic rights. The promises made in the Istanbul Declaration and the Habitat Agenda to deal with the common challenges were never fulfilled. The vision of our leaders is still far from being realized. It is, indeed, time for introspection, for identifying obstacles that block our way and for finding solutions that will last and make a difference in our lives.

Poverty induces migration to lands of perceived opportunities and promises. For the majority, cities offer these opportunities and a glimmer of hope. Unsustainable migration to urban areas leads to the progressive deterioration of civic amenities. The realities of urban life, the high cost of living, and rising unemployment generate desolation. At a political level, this desolation is reflected in ethnic, communal and sectarian tensions and violence, and at the social level in anti-social attitudes, rampant alcoholism, drug abuse

and prostitution. The consequent threat of social disintegration in turn increases poverty. And the vicious cycle goes on. The real challenge for us, the international community, is how to break this vicious cycle.

In today's globalized world, development in every sphere is characterized by asymmetrical patterns. Human settlements are no exception. Cities and urban areas today occupy only 2 per cent of the earth's land, but contain 50 per cent of its population and consume 45 per cent of its resources. The global urban population will double in the next two decades from 2.5 billion to 5 billion. But the growth in resources to deal with the booming urban crises has failed to keep pace with the unbridled expansion of human settlements.

The developing countries will be the hardest hit by this phenomenon of shrinking resources and exploding urban population. By 2015 — the year for which we have set the target of cutting poverty in half — out of 23 megacities with more than 10 million people, 19 will be in developing countries. Logically, developing countries will require more resources to empower their cities to deal with the problems of civic life.

Ironically, the abject poverty in the cities of the developing world contrasts sharply with the concentrated affluence of cities in the developed world. The Istanbul Declaration unambiguously points to the prevailing modes of production and consumption in the industrialized countries as carriers of a contagion threatening the very survival of this planet. This contagion needs to be addressed, as the cost it forces this poor planet and its human settlements to pay is simply unaffordable.

Globalization that some saw as producing many bounties is turning out to be a bane in our societies today. Its dividends have been blatantly unequal. If the global society cannot help the many who are poor, it cannot save the few who are well off. If globalization is to be made beneficial for all, as was envisioned by our leaders during the Millennium Summit last September, humanity at large will have to be given the capacity to equally share its benefits.

Pakistan played a crucial role in the drafting of both the Istanbul Declaration and the Habitat Agenda. Our commitment to both documents remains unstinting and unflinching. Our presence here is, therefore, not merely symbolic, but a manifestation of our continued resolve to uphold and implement the Habitat Agenda.

The Istanbul Declaration and the Habitat Agenda call for sustainable urban development and adequate shelter for all. The Government of Pakistan has taken a number of measures to achieve these two objectives. The allocation of significant resources for the eradication of poverty, accelerating the grant of legal-tenure status to slum dwellers, adopting a time-bound action plan for environmental conservation, assigning high priority to wastewater treatment and the safe disposal of solid wastes are some of the initiatives of the Government in Pakistan that cover significant areas of the Habitat Agenda.

One of the most significant steps aimed at empowering the city governments to deal with their problems effectively is the formulation of the people-centred Local Government Plan. This Plan will facilitate devolution of power at the local level. The financial autonomy being granted to new local councils under this plan will ensure good urban governance and functional democracy at the grass-roots level.

In my country, the period under review has been marked by an increased awareness of health-sanitation linkages, greater involvement of non-governmental organizations in environmental sanitation, hygiene education and preventive medicine, and a deliberate focus by the Government and external support agencies on the eradication of poverty. The Government is also encouraging the enhanced role of women and minority groups in all areas of development activity, associating them with every dynamic development paradigm.

It is our proud distinction that two of our world renowned best practices — namely, the Orangi Pilot Project in Karachi and the Faisalabad Area Upgrading Project are now being studied, with a view to replication, by government officials and non-governmental organizations from a number of countries. Some of them have already adopted the "internal/external" model of the Orangi Pilot Project.

In short, being fully cognizant of the importance of the Habitat Agenda, Pakistan is taking concrete steps for its implementation at all levels.

The Preparatory Committee meetings for this special session discussed an important problem specific to urban poverty in many developing countries. This problem pertains to the challenges posed by wars and

conflicts and by the consequent influx of refugees and their impact on human settlements. The influx of refugees from unstable countries has further distorted the economic, social and demographic patterns of the human settlements in the neighbouring States. This challenge can only be tackled by direct and proactive measures of the United Nations at two levels. First, the United Nations, as a whole, should take bold, unbiased, impartial and practical decisions and steps for conflict prevention in volatile regions.

Secondly, the Commission on Human Settlements, in conjunction with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, should evolve a strategy to provide shelter and other basic services to internally displaced people in areas unaffected by the conflicts within their country's borders. This would help check the expansion of settlement crises to the cities of neighbouring countries. Any contrary approach is likely to heighten political tensions and further strain the tenuous economic and social resource base of human settlements.

Let me now comment on the institutional progress made so far to develop viable implementation mechanisms for the Habitat Agenda. We are fully aware of the importance of the mandate of the Commission on Human Settlements. Undoubtedly, the implementation of the Habitat Agenda requires a strategic vision and a coordinated approach, integrating isolated initiatives and seeking synergies with the organizations involved directly or indirectly in similar processes. In this regard, we support the reform process within the Commission to make it effective in addressing the challenges it faces. We also welcome the appointment of the Executive Director of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements and assure her of our full support and cooperation in faithful, practical interpretation of the Habitat Agenda.

May I take this opportunity to extend my deep appreciation for the Cities without Slums action plan initiative launched in 1999. The programme aims to improve the lives of 100 million city dwellers by 2020. We urge further international cooperation and support to expand the scope of this initiative to alleviate the misery of slum dwellers in other parts of the world, especially Africa, Latin America and South Asia.

The problems facing by our settlements are gigantic, the resources at our disposal are scarce, and international assistance to deal with the problems is inadequate. This review conference presents a valuable opportunity to take concrete steps towards fulfilment of the commitments made by all partners in Istanbul. Let us rise to the occasion and build together, for our coming generations, a world where everyone can live in a safe home with the promise of a decent life of dignity, good health, safety and happiness.

The President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Madina Jarbussynova, chairperson of the delegation of Kazakhstan.

Ms. Jarbussynova (Kazakhstan): Allow me to join previous speakers in congratulating all of you on the beginning of the special session of the General Assembly for an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) and to express the hope that our work during this session will be fruitful and effective.

Despite the considerable progress accomplished in improving housing conditions in many parts of the world, more than 1 billion people still live in inadequate housing, with limited access to basic services. Five years after the adoption of the Habitat Agenda, the goals of this programme remain distant in almost all developing countries of the world.

Today we have the opportunity to look back at the past, evaluate the present and think about the future. This year, the people of Kazakhstan will celebrate the tenth anniversary of its independent development. The last decade of the twentieth century will be remembered for all of its changes and outstanding events, as will the century itself, during which Kazakhstan was transformed from a colonial rural outpost of the Russian empire into one of the most developed republics of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. It is now entering the new millennium as an independent sovereign State, with all the problems of the urbanized world.

The urbanization of poverty is one of the most challenging problems facing the world today. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the appearance of new independent States on the world map, poverty has been rising in Kazakhstan, and it is now a serious problem. This sharp rise in poverty was caused by persistent economic difficulties. Economic contraction resulted in an increase in unemployment and a decline in personal

income. Poverty is pervasive in urban areas, and those most affected are pensioners, women, and children.

The President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbaev, said in a message to his people: "We should alleviate and eliminate poverty in the next few years." The Government of Kazakhstan has taken a number of measures to achieve these goals. It has elaborated a State programme on fighting poverty and unemployment. This programme, the implementation of which began in the year 2000, aims at reducing poverty by creating income-generating job opportunities, maintaining delivery of social services and strengthening social protection for vulnerable groups. In particular, the programme proposes to reduce by half the unemployment rate by the year 2002.

The Government realizes that for effective implementation of the anti-poverty programme, more continued efforts are needed in a clearly articulated infrastructure investment policy for urban basic services. Special attention should be paid to stimulating the development of small and medium-size enterprises and strengthening the capacities of local governments, which are primarily responsible for delivering basic public services and providing social assistance to the urban poor.

Kazakhstan faces major environmental problems as a result of the policies pursued during the Soviet period, which failed to take into account the cost of land, water and air degradation and which led to an overuse of natural resources. Centrally planned practices associated with extensive production schemes in massive industrial and chemical complexes have polluted the air, soil and water. The urban environment has also been polluted from coal-burning power plants and lack of forest cover or vegetation.

The Government of Kazakhstan adopted a national environmental strategy aimed at reducing environmental pollution and natural resource degradation. In 1998, the Government also developed a national environmental action plan, which proposes a number of priority policy reforms and investment projects to address urgent environmental concerns. The major policy issues proposed include environmental legislation and regulation, environmental management, promotion of cleaner technology, human resources development, and capacity-building for monitoring and enforcement. In addition, the Government is facilitating inter-municipal cooperation for environmental planning and management and for the preparation of urban development strategies. Concrete results have been achieved in such areas as "greening", redevelopment of post-industrial areas and buildings, and public housing rehabilitation.

In addition to devastating environmental problems, Kazakhstan's water resources are among the least abundant among Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries. It is suffering from inadequate water services and a shortage of safe drinking water in some urban areas. This has undesirable consequences for the people. Consumers incur significant time costs and inconvenience in coping with deficient services; many collect water from rivers and irrigation channels. Poor and unsafe water service is responsible for deteriorating public health and increased expenditures on health, with the poor being affected the most.

The Government of Kazakhstan is conscious of the urgent need to improve water services through policy and institutional reforms and repair and rehabilitation of existing infrastructure. It has developed a State water strategy and soon plans to prepare a State strategy for urban household water supply that will set out specific targets and action plans. It also intends to rehabilitate the existing water supply and sanitation systems through budgetary allocations and external borrowing. Public-private partnerships can enhance efficiency in the water supply sector, and effective regulatory control can ensure that poor neighbourhoods are not neglected.

A very important step in the implementation of our country's development strategy has been a recent transfer of the capitol from Almaty to Astana. The basic reasons for the transfer were the geopolitical location of the latter city in the centre of the country, the intersection of the large-scale transportation roads and the availability of communications infrastructure. Although only a short time period has passed since relocation, the city has changed beyond recognition. Its infrastructure is being developed rapidly and a new image is being formed.

However, now Astana faces specific problems, such as growing demand for new housing. The provision of housing has become a priority of the Government and local authorities in the framework of the overall programme aimed at achieving "better, more liveable and inclusive human settlements" (*draft*

Declaration on cities and other human settlements in the new millennium, para. 10).

Today, at the start of the new millennium, aware of our responsibilities to future generations, Kazakhstan is strongly committed to providing adequate shelter for all our people, and we consider implementation of the Habitat Agenda an integral part of the pursuit of sustainable development. Obviously, in the twenty-first century, the development of human settlements will be a key factor for sustainable development.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Fernando Nasarre y de Goicochea, Director-General of Housing, Architecture and Urban Planning of the Ministry of Public Works of Spain.

Mr. Nasarre y de Goicochea (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow me first of all to express my satisfaction at having the opportunity to speak to the General Assembly and to reaffirm my delegation's support for the decision to devote this special session to the review and appraisal of the Habitat Agenda. The Spanish delegation concurs with what was said by the Presidency of the European Union, in particular its appraisal of the importance of cities for economic, social and cultural development and for environmental sustainability.

The implementation of the Habitat Agenda and the commitments adopted in Istanbul in 1996 have inspired many of the working programmes of the Spanish administration at all levels — national, regional and local — in cooperation with civilian society.

I would like to mention briefly some of the activities undertaken in my country, which I believe could serve as a frame of reference for specific instruments aimed at the practical implementation and development of the Istanbul commitments. We have the Spanish committee on Habitat, which was created in the course of preparing for the Istanbul Conference. It is a venue for meetings and deliberations and serves as a catalyst for disseminating the Habitat Agenda at the national level. Also, through that committee, whose secretariat includes a Ministry of Promotion, Spain has been promoting the broadest participation in international competitions, sponsored by the United Nations, on best practices and local leadership. Thanks to that promotion work, Spanish best practices presented at those biennial competitions have won Spain the highest level of recognition worldwide because of their high quality.

In addition to having a significant number of best practices selected among the 100 best in each competition, in 1998 the programme for the improvement of the urban environment of Malaga won one of the 10 international awards. In 2000 the "green rails" programme for ecologically sound reuse of abandoned railways, presented by the Spanish railway foundation, also won one of the 10 international awards.

This has contributed significantly to disseminating the culture of sustainability, bolstered by the publication of the various catalogues reporting the results of the competitions and by an itinerant exhibition that has been presented both in Spain and in other countries. In this regard we should note the establishment in 1997 of the Internet library called "Cities for a more sustainable future", which, along with other information, gives a database on best practices translated into Spanish. Since it was set up, it has proved to be a very valuable consultation tool for the exchange of information and a meeting place for the Spanish-speaking community.

With respect to housing, in recent years the efforts of all administrations to implement the objective of adequate shelter for all have been notable. At the State level, in particular, numerous housing plans have been developed. The current plan, for 1998-2001, seeks to give lower-medium-income families access to ownership of homes for the first time while also promoting the supply of rental housing.

Lastly, in the area of international cooperation for development, I would like to note as particularly important the adoption in 1998 of the law on international cooperation for development. This law is a milestone in that it indicates the following as guiding principles of Spanish cooperation policy: recognition of the human individual as the protagonist and main beneficiary of the policy of international cooperation for development; respect for human rights and commitment to democracy and public freedoms; the promotion of global human development that is interdependent, participatory and sustainable with lasting and sustainable economic growth; and respect for commitments undertaken in international agencies.

As a striking example of cooperation directly related to the Habitat Agenda, we can cite the Ibero-American and Caribbean Forum on Best Practices. This forum emerged directly from Habitat II, and its purpose is to expand in all countries of the region the participation of civil society in policies for the development of human settlement. This programme has spread throughout the region and is managed through the Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements.

We have come a long way since the 1996 meeting in Istanbul, but we still have many problems to resolve, and others are emerging. We need to intensify our efforts and step up our cooperation to improve the general living conditions in our cities and human settlements. To this end, the States are mediators, and they have to establish the international and local frameworks to coordinate global and local action. This first opportunity for local authorities to speak to the General Assembly is a good example of the spirit of cooperation, which we fully support. In this regard, we are particularly gratified that it should be a Spanish mayor, The Honourable Joan Clos, Mayor of Barcelona, who will be speaking to the Assembly on behalf of local authorities throughout the world. Furthermore, we welcome the fact that Barcelona's experience of sustainable economic transformation and decentralization has been selected as one of the examples to be presented to the Thematic Committee.

In conclusion, I would like to reaffirm Spain's determined resolve to work in this direction by fulfilling the commitments that we undertake in the Assembly in order to achieve the objectives of adequate shelter for all and sustainable human settlements in a world of growing urbanization.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now call on Mr. Nicolás Rivas, representative of Colombia.

Mr. Rivas (Colombia) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation conveys its greetings to all other delegations and expresses its hope for success in the work of this special session, which has been convened to carry out the first five-year review of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II).

Five years ago the international community met and agreed to work together to find real solutions to the problems facing cities and human settlements worldwide. They adopted the Istanbul Declaration and the Habitat Agenda. Convinced that these issues are important for the sustainable development of our peoples, we committed ourselves to working tirelessly in this arduous undertaking. Today, we are engaged in the first appraisal of the implementation of that ambitious programme. We see tangible positive results for some, and results that are not so good, or not so apparent, for others.

Colombia has made a great effort, and we can say with satisfaction that we have made progress in implementing many of the goals of the Habitat Agenda. But we must acknowledge the difficulty of the task before us. Colombia took an active part in the preparatory process for the special session because it deeply believes that this is an important undertaking. In the various forums in which that process took place, Colombia spoke of the political will that our Government brought to it, and of the progress we have made in meeting the commitments of the Habitat Agenda.

Let me mention some of those achievements. Colombia has used the supply of housing as an instrument of development. Housing has become a right for families affected by violence; it has generated employment; and it has revitalized the economy. Housing production has trebled in our country over the past 25 years. The Government has launched a major urbanization programme, building public housing on plots of land, making use of resources contributed by friendly countries. This housing is intended to provide a suitable social environment for families affected by violence and by other disturbances. In my country, the private sector and local authorities are and will continue to be strong allies in implementing social programmes, with housing as a priority. Strategic alliances among those actors enable us to enhance the efforts and resources available to that end.

Article 51 of the Colombian constitution includes decent housing among the economic, social and cultural rights enjoyed by all Colombians. It declares that the State is to provide the conditions necessary to make that right effective, through the implementation of housing programmes and suitable long-term financing systems along with other elements needed to carry out such housing programmes. For Colombia, this marks the introduction of a system of direct subsidies. Our social housing policy subsidizes access to housing for lowest-income families. The agencies

responsible for carrying out that policy include the Instituto Nacional de Vivienda de Interés Social y Reforma Urbana (INURBE), a governmental body responsible for families with no formal link to the labour market; its resources are drawn from the national budget. They also include the various family compensation funds: private entities assisting families with a formal link to the labour market; their funding comes from para-budgetary sources.

At present, 42 million people live in Colombia; some 30 million — 72 per cent — live in about 1,100 urban centres. Their distribution is sometimes concentrated and sometimes scattered. But it is unquestionably true that urban life predominates. From the rural life of the 1950s we have come to the urban life of the present day. This accelerated urbanization has had many effects, both positive and negative. Thus, it can be said that today's Colombia is a land of cities. The national Government and local authorities have taken up the challenge of redesigning the process of intervention in urban life, on the premise that such action is a public function in which collective interests outweigh individual interests, and in which the social and ecological aspects of ownership are addressed. But the challenges of urban planning cannot be tackled solely by the public sector, whether local or national. At present, responsibilities are shared by the State, unions, consumers, producers and others. This is public responsibility in its truest sense.

Clearly, cities and urban human settlements must be sustainable. The relationship among the economic, social and environmental variables must be harmonious if it is to be sustainable over time. One key element here is urban transportation. Local administrations in Colombia have adopted sustainable urban transport strategies aimed at providing mass transport that makes efficient use of time, fuel and energy, and they strive to optimize the provision of transportation throughout the public space by putting in place adequate transportation networks.

In spite of the Colombian Government's enormous endeavours, there are problems resulting from rapid and sometimes unregulated urbanization and from the impact of an internal armed conflict that has brought hundreds of Colombians to urban centres, as well as from the effects of the world economic recession. These have made it very difficult for us to implement our human settlements policies. We are convinced that the future challenges we face in providing decent housing for all Colombians, in ensuring safe cities with an infrastructure of basic services and in eliminating crime, poverty and corruption can be met only with the commitment of our own citizens first and foremost, and with, as a crucial complement, the assistance of the international community through strengthened international cooperation.

Our domestic efforts will be more effective if we can count on the transfer of needed technology and if multilateral credit institutions join together to facilitate financing for social programmes, especially housing programmes.

We believe that this special session should clearly signal the need for stronger and more aggressive implementation of the Habitat Agenda. A spirit of cooperation and partnership among Governments, local authorities, the private sector, civil society and non-governmental organizations is a precondition for effective implementation of the Istanbul Declaration and the Habitat Agenda. The necessary financial resources are also vital, so we must depend on effective mechanisms and institutions. Here, Colombia supports the strengthening of the Commission on Human Settlements and of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Anwarul Karim Chowdhury, Chairman of the delegation of Bangladesh.

Mr. Chowdhury (Bangladesh): Bangladesh believes that the twenty-fifth special session of the General Assembly, for an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), will send a wakeup call to the international community to fulfil its commitment to implementing the Habitat Agenda, focusing on adequate shelter for all and on sustainable human settlements development in an increasingly urbanizing world.

The Government of Bangladesh, in line with its commitment to the implementation of the 1996 Habitat Agenda, has been making determined efforts in key areas of human settlements. The Bangladesh national report on progress made since Habitat II has been presented to the Assembly at this special session. It is structured around 20 key commitments emanating from the Habitat Agenda. These are organized under six broad themes: shelter, social development and the

eradication of poverty, environmental management, economic development, governance, and international cooperation.

In preparing the country report, views of the Government, the local authorities, the private sector and non-governmental organizations were taken into account and experts from the government departments, academic and research institutions dealing with housing, urban planning and development issues associated.

The Government of Bangladesh has created necessary institutional structures, including the formation of a National Urban Observatory Committee and a local urban observatory in major cities. It is hoped that the measures will allow Bangladesh to connect to the Global Urban Observatory network in its efforts to collect and disseminate relevant data and best practices on human settlements-related activities.

The Government, under the leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, has been making its best efforts to reduce the plight of the urban and rural poor by providing major investment in education, health care, agriculture, rural development and employment generation. The Government has launched a number of housing projects for the poor, the landless and the slum dwellers. The Asrayon — "home for the homeless" — project to resettle 50,000 families and Ekti Bari Ekti Khamar — "one homestead, one farm" — for the rural landless and homeless people are two of the laudable initiatives. Another project, Ghare Phera — "return home" — is a unique programme under which several credit schemes have been launched to encourage urban slum dwellers to return to their own villages and to start income-generating activities there.

The Government is also supporting the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee, the largest non-governmental organization in the country, to build rental accommodations for female industrial workers in Dhaka. A number of non-governmental organizations are also active in extending credit and in improving the shelter conditions of the poor, particularly women garment-factory workers. The Government and the Grameen Bank, later joined by a few non-governmental organizations, are extending microcredit for income-generating activities and improving shelter conditions. The Government is also trying to improve and expand the delivery of basic services to citizens in general and the poor in particular through a number of projects, some of which are being implemented from external assistance.

In its effort to implement the two global campaigns on security of tenure and urban governance, Bangladesh included a provision in its national housing policy that eviction is illegal without rehabilitation. The High Court of the country, in a landmark judgement, also declared the eviction of squatters without rehabilitation illegal. Focused efforts for effective macroeconomic management have positive impacts on both urban and rural settlements development.

Review of the Habitat Agenda in the context undertaken at the national, regional and international levels has underscored the importance of partnership in the context of the increasing interdependence of countries in the ongoing globalization process. It has also demonstrated that commitment at all levels is a sine qua non to providing secure and improved living conditions for the poor, to promoting gender equality and inclusiveness in human settlements development, to intensifying efforts to improve governance and to recognition of the added significance of international cooperation in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda.

In spite of the general progress and prosperity of the world, the most serious problems confronting the developing countries and their citizens include, inter alia, inadequate financial resources, lack of employment opportunities, homelessness, the expansion of squatter settlements, pervasive poverty, the widening gap between rich and poor, growing insecurity, inadequate services and infrastructure, lack of health and educational facilities, insecure land tenure, rising traffic congestion, increasing pollution, inadequate water supplies and sanitation and vulnerability to disaster. It is therefore high time for the international community to move forward with renewed commitment to acting in areas where we can collectively make a difference, particularly in improving the shelter conditions of at least 1 billion urban residents in developing countries, who live in life- and health-threatening conditions.

In this context, we strongly believe that the least developed countries deserve special attention. I should like to assure the President of the General Assembly of Bangladesh's full support in making this special session a resounding success.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Ellen Margrethe Løj, Chairperson of the delegation of Denmark.

Ms. Løj (Denmark): Denmark fully associates itself with the statement made by the representative of Sweden on behalf of the European Union.

Furthermore, I would like to express the sincere hope of the Government of Denmark that this special session will be an Istanbul+5 and not an Istanbul -5. The visionary partnership spirit of the Istanbul Conference, with the participation of all Habitat partners, should be maintained so that we can reconfirm our commitments to the Habitat Agenda.

A large number of poor people live in unacceptable conditions in slum dwellings and in homelessness. City environments are deteriorating rapidly and pollution is often out of control. Positive interplay between rural and urban areas is a precondition for sustainable development.

Thus, the developed countries must show more solidarity with the developing countries. The industrialized countries must develop a much more rational and effective use of resources and join forces with the developing countries to combat poverty and to improve human living conditions. Increased official development assistance is indispensable if we are serious about reaching these ambitious targets.

Danish official development assistance to the poorest developing countries is at 1 per cent of the Danish gross national product. In addition, we are moving to earmark an extra half per cent of the Danish gross national product for special environmental and emergency activities. This enables us, inter alia, to assist low- and middle-income countries in improving the environment, one target area being industry and urban areas.

Partnership between Governments and civil society is a keyword in Danish development assistance. The overall objective for Danish development assistance is to promote sustainable development through poverty reduction focusing on three elements: broad economic growth, expansion of social sectors and good governance. Respect for individual rights and the incorporation of men and women alike in democratic decision-making processes constitute objectives in their own right, but are also means for establishing sustainable societies.

The main responsibility for the implementation of the Habitat Agenda rests with the individual countries. It involves all actors and requires concerted efforts at all levels, especially the local level. As part of a revision of the Danish Planning Act in the spring of 2000, work on Agenda 21 has become compulsory. All municipalities and counties must present an account of their local Agenda 21 strategies at least once every four years. In our urban policy, we seek a bottom-up approach with priority on local participation.

Under the theme "Development with care — a common responsibility", the Danish Government has launched a proposal for Denmark's sustainable development strategy. The core issue is how to deal with the dilemma of maintaining a high level of welfare and employment and, at the same time, breaking the link between economic growth and its negative impact on the environment and natural resources.

An overall objective of Danish urban policy is to ensure that cities remain centres for growth and development in society as such. A key part therein is to combat urban segregation, which constitutes a major barrier to integrated and sustainable urban development. In that way we want to combat social exclusion in the housing market in cities, as well as in society in general.

Keywords of Denmark's follow-up to the Habitat Agenda are quality through participation, partnership, transparency, local ownership and social responsibility. Physical and urban planning must be carried out in collaboration with the beneficiaries, the people. In that context, I would like to highlight three important issues for urban development: integrated development, sustainable development and decentralization — in short, good urban governance.

The international conferences should complement each other. The Habitat review process should therefore draw upon the work being carried out in other conferences. One example is to use the results and common indicators from the Cairo Conference on Population and Development when it comes to questions related to population growth. Another is to draw upon the Copenhagen Social Summit's Programme of Action in relation to urban poverty.

In conclusion, Denmark pledges to continue its efforts to promote sustainable human settlements and to work for the implementation of the Habitat Agenda.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Luis Raúl Estévez-López, representative of Guatemala.

Mr. Estévez-López (Guatemala) (*spoke in Spanish*): As a result of last-minute difficulties that prevented the participation at this gathering of our Government's highest official in the area of human settlements, I have the great honour of presenting a brief overview of Guatemala's experience regarding the Habitat Agenda, which was adopted at Istanbul five years ago.

I begin by reaffirming our commitment to the principles of the Agenda and by stating that the policies and actions that have been carried out in my country since 1996 conform to a great extent to the Istanbul Declaration on Human Settlements and the Habitat Agenda. At the 1996 Conference we adopted the universal objectives of guaranteeing adequate housing for all and ensuring that human settlements become safer, healthier, more habitable, more equitable, more sustainable and more productive. Now, five years later, we are taking stock of both what has been accomplished and the great deal that remains to be done.

One of the most recent accomplishments in Guatemala has been the formulation of a national housing and human settlements policy that is aimed primarily at providing Guatemalan families with access to adequate housing. The policy gives priority to families living in poverty or extreme poverty and to vulnerable and disadvantaged groups by strengthening the legal, institutional, financial and technological framework that governs the housing sector. It also aims to do this by efficiently developing the supply of housing, improving and expanding existing housing and providing basic services, with the participation of central and local government, organized groups of the population, non-governmental organizations, the business sector and international cooperation. This policy has been prepared through a process of consultation with the various sectors of civil society and actors in the area of real estate development and housing financing. It has, in other words, been formulated as a comprehensive, long-term State policy.

In 1996 the housing and human settlements law was enacted to establish institutional, technical and financial bases to facilitate a worthy and adequate solution to the housing problem. The institutional framework created by that law was subsequently influenced by the commitments entered into under the peace agreements concluded in December of the same year. Among other things, a specific programme was set up for refugees, returnees, repatriated and internally displaced people, handicapped persons and widows.

Within that overall context, and within the existing limitations, various concrete measures were taken. They include the granting of housing subsidies and loans, in particular for families living in poverty or extreme poverty; the creation of an investment trust to bring about a secondary market of guaranteed mortgages and to recycle funds for the financing of housing units; and the granting of ownership of plots on State-owned land for the settlement of squatters.

In addition, implementing these policies in Guatemala involves certain particular features. The majority of our population is rural, with close to 65 per cent of the people living in the countryside. It is for that reason that efforts have been made to strengthen the role of local administration as an agent of development. Moreover, we are also subject to the problems of intense urbanization: over 2.5 million of our inhabitants are concentrated in Guatemala City, with all the resource demands and environmental difficulties that entails.

In that regard, since the mid-1980s Guatemala's institutional framework has enacted local legislation on urban and rural development councils and, most importantly, on a municipal code. Those laws have been the basis for ensuring that mayors' offices are the executive and administrative bodies of local government. Notwithstanding the progress made, there are still constraints on municipal development. The capacity of mayors' offices to obtain their own resources from the contributions of the inhabitants of their cities is low and, as a result, they must rely on State funds.

In brief, our policies on human settlements are incorporated in our 2000-2004 social policy matrix. They provide for a reorganization of the public institutions that provide support to the housing sector and for a more fruitful relationship with private institutions. They also include such long-term financial mechanisms as the establishment of a secondary market for guaranteed mortgages. Another aim is the granting of ownership rights to squatters, particularly on State-owned land. Finally, dialogue and conciliation

have been promoted as the means of resolving conflict and adopting policies in the are of human settlements.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Peter Gurtner, State Secretary and Director-General of the Federal Housing Office of Switzerland.

Mr. Gurtner (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): What has Switzerland done, in the five years since the holding of the Istanbul Conference, to improve the quality of life in cities and metropolitan areas and to apply the principles of sustainable development to the development of human settlements, both on its territory and in the disadvantaged regions of the world?

I can only give a few examples in this short statement. Before I do so, I must make it clear that the measures that have been taken have been taken not only through the Habitat Agenda. The choice of domestic policies and the Rio process have also played an important role. As participants will see, these measures are themselves part of the Habitat Agenda process.

Last year Switzerland adopted a new constitution. Switzerland is committed to promoting sustainable development in all areas and at all State levels. This goes for the central themes of the Habitat Agenda, such as policies on cities and urban areas and policies on housing and development cooperation.

Allow me to illustrate these points through three examples. The first example is urban policies. Urban areas that represent axes of economic activity, cultural centres, centres of progress, as well as the opening of doors to the world, play an important role in the country's development. But they are also facing certain problems caused by a kind of functional and social segregation that is getting worse. The increasing spread of residential areas is causing a huge increase in traffic flows and the speedy deterioration of the quality of the urban environment and further displacements of people who leave the city centres for outlying areas.

This development is causing problems to local authorities, who do not have the resources to resolve these problems alone. Because of this, the people who are directly concerned have taken many initiatives, implicitly or explicitly, based on the local Agenda 21 programme, but the cities concerned that are politically autonomous and are in principle solely responsible for resolving their problems depend on the solidarity of other regions and other public authorities. This solidarity was recently shown at the conference on urbanization, allowing for the establishment of an institutional framework in which cities and communes, cantons and the federation can draft a common comprehensive policy.

The second example is housing policy. The demand contained in the Habitat Agenda, entitled adequate shelter for all, is one of the social goals articulated in the new federal constitution. There is no doubt for Switzerland that housing, like food, security or education, is a basic human need, and that the State must help those people that cannot meet that need themselves. In order to do this, we must work to create favourable economic and political conditions and, where needed, to introduce measures and targeted incentives.

The current revision of Switzerland's housing policy is aimed at supporting the weakest economic stakeholders, in close cooperation with the private organizations that are responsible for building public housing. This example shows how important partnership is between the private and the public sectors in Switzerland.

The third example is development cooperation. Swiss development cooperation in urban development is guided by three important considerations. First, we must think of rural and urban development as interdependent and complementary. Secondly, cooperation is directed towards the poorest urban dwellers because it is a basic principle of a federal law on development cooperation and because it is a fundamental principle of the solidarity of our country with the world. Thirdly, Swiss cooperation is seeking to strengthen initiatives and the sense of responsibility among urban dwellers to make them promoters of their own development.

At the present time, Swiss development cooperation supports urban programmes in several countries by stressing local governance, decentralization, capacity-building, the participation of civil society, the creation of infrastructures and the fight against poverty. It also participates actively in the international political dialogue through the main multilateral and bilateral urban networks.

So this brief presentation shows that the principles and strategies for implementing the Habitat Agenda serve as a particularly useful framework for

Swiss policies. It is therefore important in Switzerland's view that during this Conference, the international community renew and strengthen the commitments it undertook in Istanbul by adopting the Habitat Agenda and its related Declaration. For all the poor and needy of the world, Istanbul is a symbol of hope and a better life. Istanbul+5 must not dash these hopes. It must become the symbol of real change towards more democracy, less social inequality and more opportunities for everyone. With its means Switzerland is committed to doing everything it can to make this hope a reality.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I call on Mrs. Anna Kajumulo Tibaijuka, Executive Director of Habitat.

Mrs. Tibaijuka (Executive Director of Habitat): All of us gathered here today share a common concern about the future of our cities and the other human settlements and the process of urbanization worldwide. As we embark on the urban millennium, when over one half of humanity already live in cities and towns, with even the most rural societies in one way or the other integrated into the global network of cities and towns, the task is ever more challenging. Whether we want to eradicate poverty or eliminate homelessness, combat crime or corruption, whether we wish to reduce environmental pollution or mitigate the effects of natural and man-made disasters, we are gathered here to make common cause for the sustainable development of our living environments, our habitats.

The Habitat Agenda provides us with signposts into that common future, a future of sustainable human settlements and adequate shelter for all. The international consensus reached in 1996 was the single most important achievement of Istanbul.

The evaluation of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, with about 100 countries having submitted their national reports, clearly demonstrates that the international community shares a common purpose: the political will to face the global urban challenge and the desire to work collectively in search of effective strategies to achieve our objectives. This stock-taking exercise has shown that problems cannot be willed away and homelessness and squalid living conditions will not disappear by decree. It requires from each of us, be it as individuals, members of civil society groups, local authorities, national Governments or international organizations, to make provision of adequate shelter our priority in both word and deed. At all these levels resources need to be invested in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda.

As my own report on the review of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda concludes, progress has not been what it should have been. Although commendable progress has been made, 25 per cent of humanity is still without adequate shelter. We must do better.

For this to happen, I believe that the principle objectives of the Habitat Agenda have to be mainstreamed to a greater extent into the political agenda of the international community, and the opportunity for this is now provided by the Millennium Declaration, the international community's political blueprint for the twenty-first century.

The Millennium Declaration's focus on slum upgrading — cities without slums — and its pledge of adequate shelter for 100 million slum dwellers by 2020 as fundamental to achieving its overall objective of poverty alleviation, confirms both the centrality of the Habitat Agenda to achieving sustainable development internationally and the universality of its message of adequate shelter for all. With this inclusion, the Habitat Agenda has moved to centre stage, and the implications of that fact must be noted by all of us and addressed by this special session.

Together with food and clothing, shelter is one of the most basic building blocks of any strategy or policy for poverty alleviation. Something is awfully wrong when we formulate strategies and adopt programme frameworks to fight poverty without including shelter delivery as one key element. The poor everywhere have inadequate shelter. We cannot hope to improve the health of the poor without improving their housing and turning slums and tenements into liveable neighbourhoods. We cannot hope to educate children, to bring light into their lives, if there is no light in their homes.

A future of liveable neighbourhoods and healthy communities, of cities without slums, will not be possible if cities do not work, are not inclusive and are divided politically, economically and socially. This alarming trend is on the rise everywhere, and in all countries. The global report on human settlements and *The State of the World's Cities* report, prepared by the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements

(Habitat) and launched at this session, convincingly demonstrate that fact.

However, that trend towards divided cities, characterized by the "haves" and the "have-nots", is most critical in the developing countries. More often than not, the poorest among these countries are the most rapidly urbanizing, and their cities simply cannot cope. We have situations in which as much as 70 per cent of the urban population is condemned to a life in slums and squatter settlements without basic infrastructure services, including sanitation, and without security. It is in such situations that infectious diseases such as tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS are flourishing. What is more, women, and the children they support, form the majority in these excluded groups. It is a dramatic situation requiring concerted national action, international cooperation and support backed by human solidarity at all levels.

Mayors, as leaders and managers of cities and city governments, are the first to be called upon to witness and respond to the daily calls for help from their constituents. As our key partners in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, they need to have the capacity and capabilities to improve the lives of their citizens and their living environment. For without empowered local authorities and good governance at the city level, we cannot hope to make inroads into poverty and improve the lives of the billions already living in cities, to say nothing of the hundreds of millions who will be there in a few years to come. While exploiting the economic opportunities presented by globalization, cities need to have effective policies and instruments in place to mitigate its adverse effects on their citizens.

The experience of developed countries suggests that with economic development and structural transformation, rural populations move to cities to exploit the opportunities that cities ultimately present. While the majority of new arrivals in cities find themselves in slums, often living in conditions worse than those they left behind in the countryside, it is the expectation that they will eventually be better off that pushes people into cities and towns. It is an irreversible process, which is why development policies and strategies cannot afford to continue to ignore urban economies and their dynamics.

In the immediate and short term, however, strategies to promote rural development and improve opportunities in rural townships are urgently required to make this transformation manageable. In Africa — which is now more urbanized than Asia, with 37.4 per cent of the population living in cities and towns, as compared with 36.6 per cent for Asia — wars and civil strife emerge as the single most important factor behind very rapid urbanization. The restoration of peace and security in the African countryside is a prerequisite for any meaningful and sustainable development effort and for implementation of the Habitat Agenda.

As focal point for the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, Habitat has adopted a new strategic vision and launched global campaigns on good urban governance and secure tenure. The two are designed to be vehicles to mobilize the international community and to strategically focus the efforts of Governments, local authorities, parliamentarians, non-governmental organizations and other Habitat Agenda partners. Only with such a focused approach, around which international cooperation can be built, can we hope to move adequate shelter for all and sustainable human settlements development forward nationally and locally. But this will also require advocacy to be linked with follow-up investment and real change on the ground, and this is exactly what Habitat's partnership with the World Bank in launching the Cities Alliance hopes to achieve.

As we embark on the urban millennium, there is no doubt that fostering and monitoring international cooperation to implement the Habitat Agenda and contribute to our broader objectives of poverty alleviation and sustainable development will require further strengthening of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements to enable it to function as an effective focal point for monitoring progress, facilitating partnership and cooperation, raising awareness, exchanging information and supporting national and local action. It is difficult to monitor and coordinate the Habitat Agenda from the periphery of the United Nations system.

Deepening international cooperation among national Governments, local authorities, parliamentarians, non-governmental organizations and other partners will also require a more continuous policy dialogue among them, and new instruments for that purpose. I therefore look forward to the work of the urban forum, which has been established by the Commission on Human Settlements and which brings

together national Governments and Habitat partners to strengthen cooperation along common lines for the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. The first meeting of the urban forum will take place in Nairobi in May 2002 and will consider the substantive follow-up to this special session, as well as help to prepare the human settlements dimension of the Rio+10 conference in Johannesburg.

Human settlements and the environment are like the proverbial chicken-and-egg paradox: while distinct, they are closely linked and influence each other. Indeed, with the rapid advances in technology, human settlements now dictate the state of the environment, rather than the other way round. We have to grapple with this reality.

As it is becoming abundantly clear through all that is being reviewed and said at this special session, implementing the Habitat Agenda and meeting its twin goals will be a core challenge of the international community in the decades to come. It is my sincere hope that as a consequence of this meeting here in New York, we will be better armed to face this challenge. For my part, as Executive Director of Habitat, I am determined to live up to the Centre's compact with the poor and, with the help of the Assembly, I hope to be able to strengthen the Habitat Centre to take on this task. I thank all Members for the support and cooperation they extended to me and the secretariat in the preparations for this session, and I look forward to their continuing support so that we can realize the vision of the Habitat Agenda — a vision of a world of better cities and other human settlements in all parts of the world and of decent homes for women, men and children everywhere.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Joan Clos, President of the World Association of Cities and Local Authorities Coordination, and Mayor of Barcelona.

Mr. Clos (President of the World Association of Cities and Local Authorities Coordination, and Mayor of Barcelona) (*spoke in Spanish*): I have the honour of addressing the Assembly in my capacity as spokesman of the local governments and cities of the world. We addressed the General Assembly for the first time five years ago in Istanbul. We were represented there by a delegation that had been chosen, a few days earlier, at the first World Assembly of Cities and Local Authorities. That was an historic event which has given us sufficient impetus to develop, from that time forward, a unification process among the world organizations of cities and local governments.

Thanks to the efforts of the Executive Director of Habitat, Mrs. Anna Kajumulo Tiabijuka, and by means of the United Nations Advisory Committee of Local Authorities, we have developed a solid relationship with the Habitat agency. A month ago in Rio de Janeiro we held the second World Assembly within the framework of the International Union of Local Authorities and the United Towns Organization meeting. Once again this was a milestone in an irreversible process.

At the same time, the news we are receiving of contemporary urban realities throughout the world remains disturbing. In the last 25 years the number of cities of more than 10 million inhabitants has quadrupled. This is not good news. In the next few decades this process of urbanization will continue. Regrettably, poverty, violence and environmental degradation remain common occurrences in many of the world's cities. A profound change in approach is essential if we are, first, to curb the growing inequality and, secondly, open the way to prosperity for the large sectors of the urban population that are mired in poverty.

In the new international order, and the prominent role played in it by big business, we need to deepen and strengthen local authorities in the political and economic spheres. Current circumstances call for thorough and prompt political reforms directed at decentralization, increasing the power of local governments, and, most fundamentally, increasing freedom, human rights and democracy. It is not going to be possible to deal with the poverty that is concentrated in urban areas in the megacities of the new millennium if we do not provide local governments with vigorous means of taking action and with sufficient political and social sensitivity to manage this dawn of the twenty-first century.

We note that on the one hand the world, with unaccustomed speed, is becoming small — everything is closer and nearer — while, on the other hand, the world is more shared, more unitary, more global. Everything and everyone travels more — people, capital and also diseases and problems related to nutrition. In this regard the mayors of the world's cities have realized that we have many shared challenges:

from water supply, the control of air pollution and traffic management, to urban safety and security and assistance to the broad sectors of the population who continue to migrate to the outlying areas of cities in search of a minimum level of decency for their lives and those of their children. In the developed world, where there is a social-protection network guaranteed by the democratic system, such conflicts can be better managed — they can be managed in a more or less normal fashion — excepting the occasional outbreaks caused by racial or cultural discrimination.

I am here to speak to United Nations representatives on behalf of grass-roots Governments, the local governments — those that are closest to the citizens. My message is that we are ready to play our rightful role, but to do this the nations must properly recognize the local governments. The designers of the United Nations were inspired rulers who still breathed the air of the Enlightenment, the century in which humanity believed that peaceful coexistence could be achieved through reason. Now, years later, this Assembly has recently adopted the Millennium Declaration, which embodies an awareness of new challenges, as well as of the need for a change of direction and of intensity as we seek solutions to the emerging problems of our times.

Awareness and reason demand that we be up to confronting these new historic circumstances. Some believe that we have too long delayed seeking to control the environment, social inequities and the problems of urbanization, and that perhaps we have simply wasted the decade of the 1990s. We are here to state our belief that there is an immense wealth of energy in the cities and in the local governments of the world — energy that can be mobilized in the right direction. We are convinced that in the global world good local government is the other side of the coin in ensuring the social balance, cohesion and solidarity vital to preventing the emerging new order from being caught up in the vicious cycle, generating greater inequality, greater social disruption and, as a result, insecurity and unrest.

Our cities can and should be the driving force for peaceful daily life. Because of what we already know and what we have learned — often in painful circumstances — we are duty-bound to avoid the mistakes of the past. In this regard the mayors who met both in Istanbul and in Rio believe that there is a real and effective role for local governments.

(*spoke in Catalan. Spanish text provided by the delegation*)

A few years ago, within these same walls we heard Pablo Casals say, "I am Catalan". He made an appeal for peace through the music of the *"Cant dels ocells"*. Today in other circumstances, but also with the idea of improving the living conditions of the men and women of the world, I want to say in my native language, Catalan — expressing the feeling of my city, Barcelona — that today what we need is stronger, more responsive and more democratic urban government.

(*spoke in Spanish*)

If we analyse one by one the objectives of Agenda 21 and the Habitat Agenda, it will be hard to find any issue that has no repercussions for the inhabitants of cities and, therefore, for the local governments, the most immediate form of governance. Every day throughout the world hundreds of thousands of mayors must tackle within their jurisdictions the consequences of decisions that very often have been taken without these mayors' participation, far from their sphere of influence. Probably, involving these mayors in the decisions and, above all, in action is the key to many solutions to the problems of this next millennium.

Local democracy, decentralization, good local governance are our watchwords. There can be no genuine economic and social development if these words are not translated into deeds. Our efforts to build an organization that represents all the local governments of the world has already yielded fruits that will endure. We form a tapestry that includes all the cities and all the mayors of the world.

I would like to convey to this Assembly our readiness to make progress on the basic principles of the Millennium Declaration, and also our readiness to work in networks of city-to-city solidarity and cooperation to meet the most pressing needs of the new phenomenon of hyper-urbanization. I would also like to ask the nations to have confidence in their cities and to help to build up their local governments.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): We have heard the last speaker in the debate for this meeting.

The meeting rose at 7.30 p.m.